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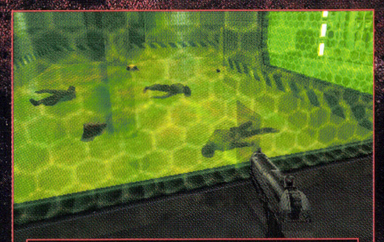

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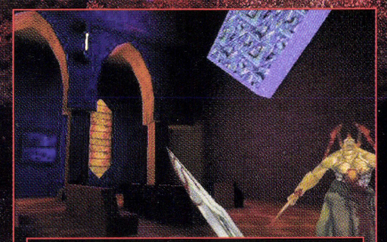

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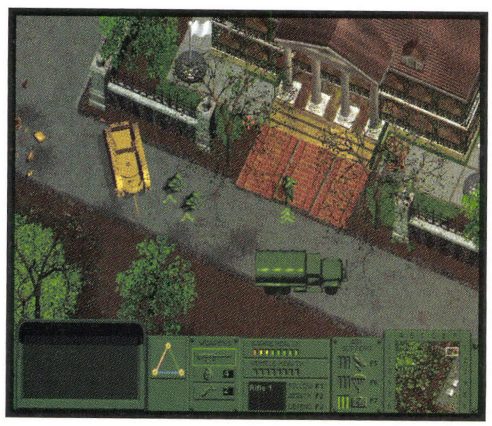

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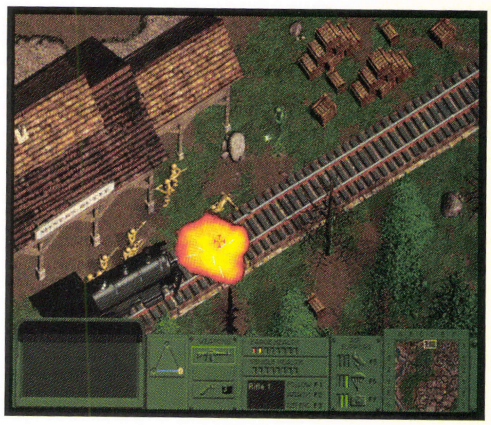

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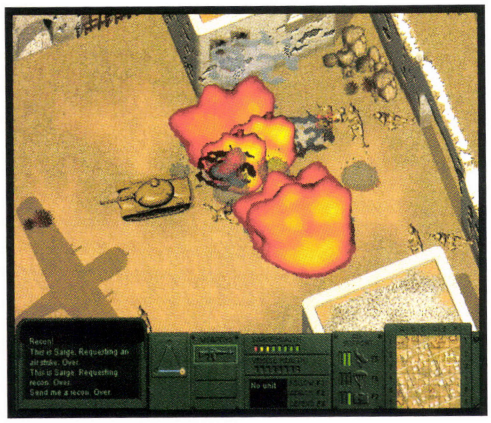

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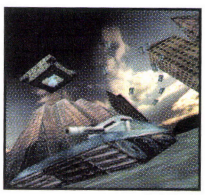
By Willem Knibbe



Hybrid strategy/action games Uprising and Battlezone garnered critical acclaim but mediocre sales. The developers have learned their lessons, and now Urban Assault, Uprising 2, and Battlezone II are poised to make an explosive re-entry.

64 King's Quest: Mask of Eternity
By Peter Olafson

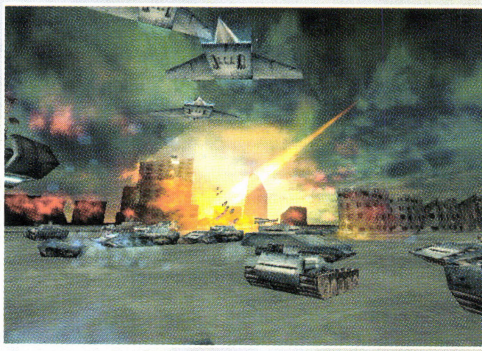
With the eighth—and possibly final—quest in the long-lived fantasy-adventure series, designer Roberta Williams strikes out in a radical new direction.

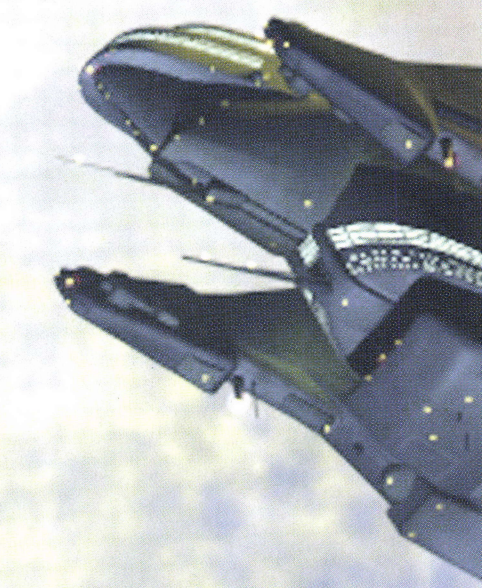
134 Hunting Big Game
By Don St. John

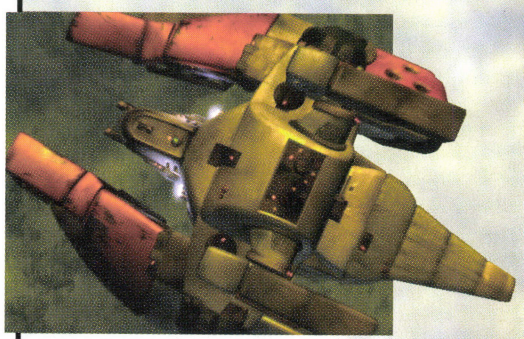
Hard as it is for us to swallow, the word "shooters" these days doesn't always refer to Quake-type games. A new breed of gamer, the hunting aficionado, has emerged from the brush. Here's a look at what's out there now, plus a look at the upcoming games and developments in this hot genre.

32 Game Wire
By Peter Olafson

Consolidation in the games industry continues as EA buys Westwood and part of Virgin while Hasbro scores MicroProse. Plus: Sierra on the sales block, a look at the sequel to Imperium Galactica (could it be in 3D?), Seven Kingdoms II, Flight Unlimited III, Interplay's Black Isle confirms a Stonekeep sequel, and we bid fond farewells to two gamers who changed the way we play.







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About the cover: *Wanting to convey the strategy/action genre's best facets—and, of course, create a cool image—we asked our resident art guru Bruce Gardner to merge elements from the major games in this genre. He chose the background and planes from Urban Assault, the imposing commander from Uprising 2, and the hovertanks from Battlezone II. Now, if Microsoft, Cyclone, and Activision would just let us pick and choose which components of their games we could meld together...*

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EDITORS' NOTE

G.CHRONIS W.KNIBBE

No More Turkeys!

We haven't even sidled up to the table for our third serving of the beloved bird and we're already sick of turkeys. Apparently we're just not the thankful type. Especially when it comes to turkeys. Especially when it comes to turkey *games*. Yeah, yeah...it's Thanksgiving and all that, and we're supposed to be humble and recite a litany of all we have to be thankful for—but we're just too preoccupied thinking about the biggest retail weekend of the year. We just don't want to see another procession of foul birds stinking up our houses and yours during the holidays.

You know what we're talking about. Good games get rushed out the door, hemorrhaging bits of code behind them, just so they can be on the shelves on or before December 24. Untested multiplayer modules crash and burn on anything less than a LAN or a T1. And let's not forget those wondrous missing promised features that somehow only make it into the "Special Edition" add-on six months down the line. No wonder these turkeys can't fly—they're missing feathers!

The reason we're ranting is that so many games get released this month and next that the turkeys start clogging the aisles. Folks could miss the truly good games, like the action/strategy hybrids that debuted this year and grace our cover this month.

We loved Battlezone and found a lot to like about Uprising. Unfortunately, despite our raves, many of you missed them. It's too early to say how Urban Assault will do—at least it has the distribution muscle of Microsoft behind it—but the jury is still out on when this new genre will catch on. That's why we went behind the scenes to see how the next wave is shaping up. Check out the cover feature on page 46.

And just to prove we're not complete curmudgeons, we will say we're thankful we added two gamers to our staff. You're already familiar with our news editor, Peter Olafson—one of our primary game reviewers and a long-standing contributor to *PC Games*. His knowledge of the industry is unparalleled, and we think you'll enjoy reading more from him in these pages. We're also glad to have Joel Strauch join us as features editor. Joel has been a hardcore gamer since he got his Commodore 64 as a kid, and he's been a regular contributor to our Technobabble section for the past year.

We're also happy to introduce you to a couple of new columns. TheWeasel has turned his online watch over to Daniel Morris and is bringing you Three-Dot Buzz, his caffeinated ruminations and ramblings on all things gaming. Daniel's No Esc spotlights the people whose personalities, interests, and quirks contribute to the gaming community. Whether they're map, mod, and mission makers, game webmasters, or insightful newsgroup junkies, Daniel will be watching them as they run in their own unique directions with the games they love.

So pass the ham and cue up the *South Park* "Spirit of Christmas" special. We're ready for December.

George T. Chronis

Willem Knibbe

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PUBLISHER *Cynthia C. Sandor*

EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR	*Corey Cohen*
REVIEWS EDITOR	*Willem Knibbe*
NEWS EDITOR	*Peter Olafson*
TECHNOLOGY EDITOR	*George T. Chronis*
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ASSISTANT EDITOR	*Danny W. Lam*
ASSISTANT DISC PRODUCER	*Christopher Tou*

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Barry Brenesal, David Gerding, Chris Hudak, Steve Klett, Bob Lindstrom, Andy Mahood, Don St. John

DESIGN/PRODUCTION

ART DIRECTOR	*Bruce Gardner*
SENIOR DESIGNER	*Ruth Walker*
PRODUCTION MANAGER	*Gloria Orbegozo*

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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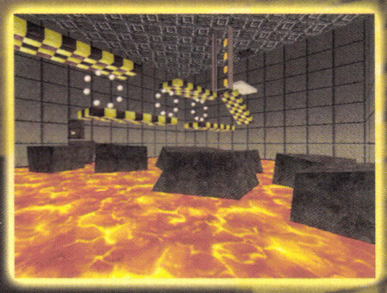

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Tech help on running the demos is the responsibility of their respective publishers. For support on running the CD interface, direct queries to *cdtech@pcgames.com*.

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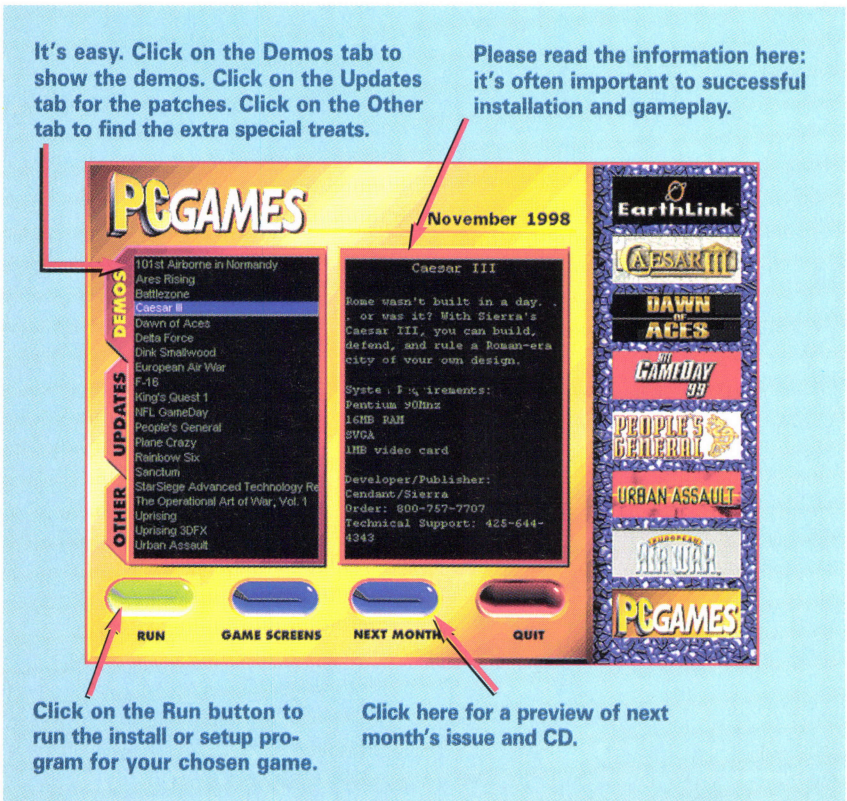

15 GREAT DEMOS

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- Ares Rising
- Caesar III
- Dawn of Aces
- Delta Force
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- Operational Art of War, Vol. I 1.03
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- Starcraft 1.02
- Unreal 2.09, UnrealGL

About That Heavy Gear II Demo...

Unfortunately, the playable demo didn't quite make it out of Activision's stringent testing department in time to make our disc. To tide us all over, they gave us an exclusive movie—and it rocks. Check it out, and rest assured that as soon as the demo's ready, it'll be available exclusively on PC Games.exe.

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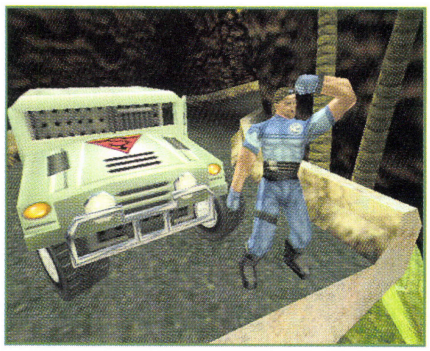
FEATURES

You wanna play 'em before you pay for 'em? Enter the Gold Program, where selected individuals are given the opportunity to play either gold or beta versions of games. So far we've featured Motocross Madness, Spearhead, and Vangers. What have we got in store next? You'll have to log onto **www.games.net** to find out.

MOVIES OF YOUR FAVORITE GAMES

Along with the already existing demos and patches, you'll also find the latest video-clips of upcoming games like Duke Nukem Forever, SiN, and Heavy Gear II.



INTERVIEWS

You want interviews? We've got 'em. We've talked with the Beneath team, the Heretic II team, and Gillian Anderson, and we just interviewed Greg LoPiccolo, creative director for Thief: The Dark Project. And don't miss fantasy-adventure guru Roberta Williams' tell-all about the latest King's Quest.

AND THAT'S NOT ALL

The Excite deal is in full effect. Games.net is now the premier content provider for the Excite Games Channel, covering both PC and console-based hardware and software gaming products. In addition to original online content from the PC Games.com and Games.net staff, the channel will feature contributions from other IDG publications, including *PCWorld*, *GamePro*, and *Tip World*.

DEMOS

Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling
Cyberball
CyberStrike 2
Game, Net & Match!
Grim Fandango
Hardwar
Motocross Madness
Rainbow Six
Recoil
SiN
Small Soldiers
Starsiege: Alpha Tech Release II
Urban Assault
WarGames

PATCHES

FIFA 98 Voodoo II
Final Fantasy VII v. 1.01
High Heat Baseball 1999 v. 1.4
Longbow Gold 3Dfx
Longbow 2 v. 2.09
Motorhead v. 1.3
Panzer Commander v. 1.1
Seven Kingdoms: Ancient Adversaries
Spec Ops Final
Starcraft v. 1.02
Total Annihilation v. 3.1
Unreal Patch v. 1.01

PREVIEWS

HeadRush
Homeworld
NCAA Football '99
NFL Blitz
NHL 99
Requiem: Wrath of the Fallen
Starsiege: Tribes

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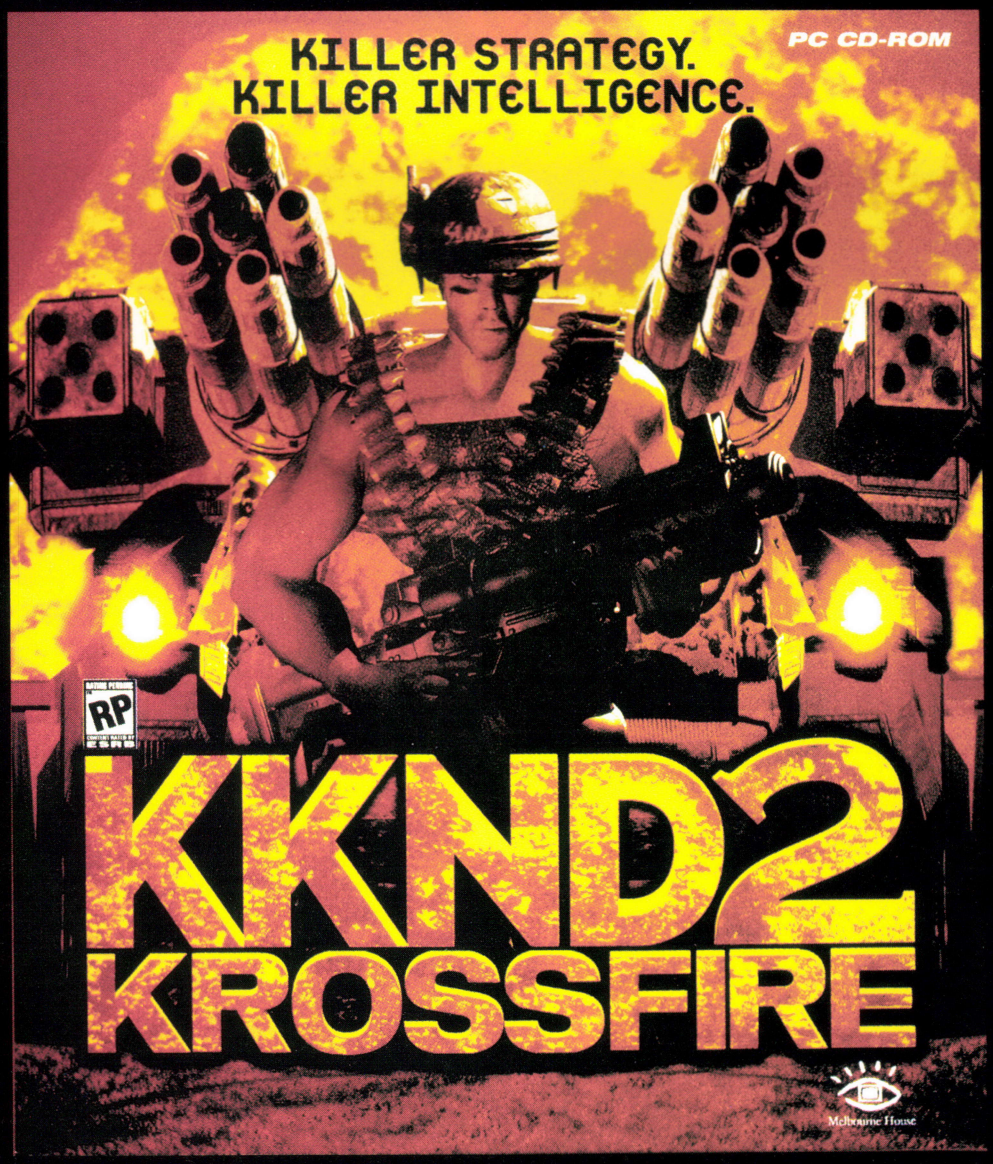

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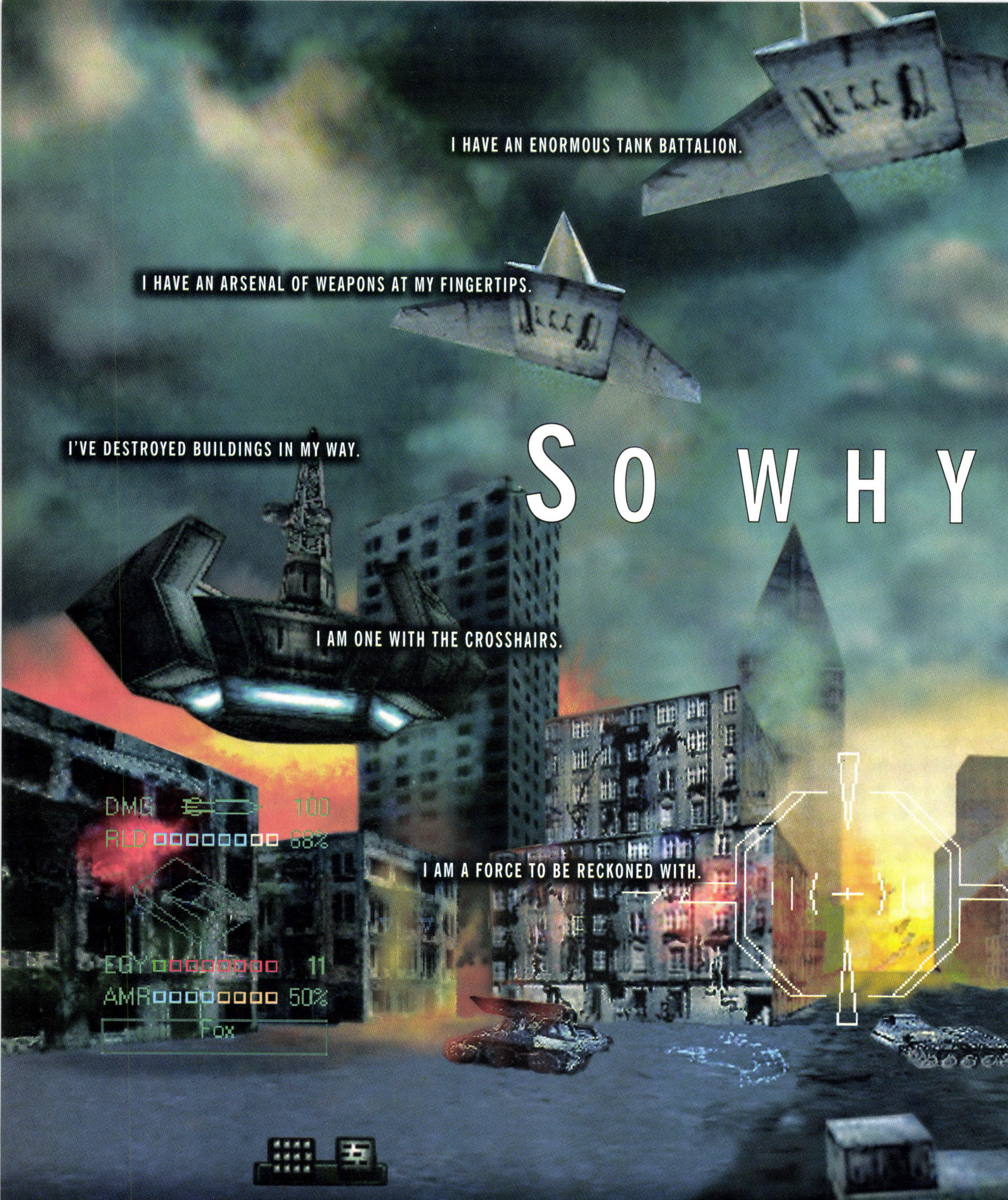

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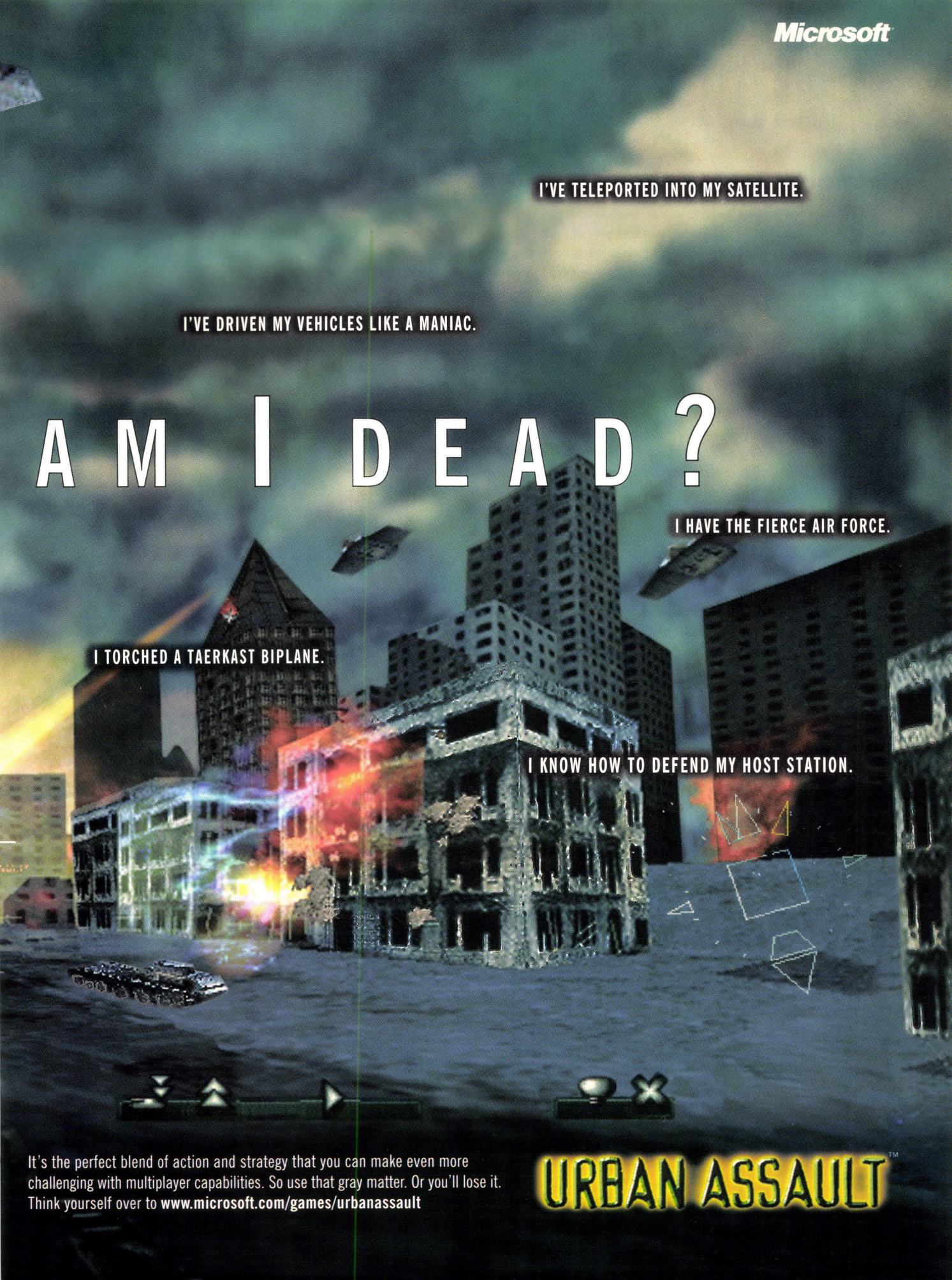
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INCOMING!

Question of the Month: Series Sellouts?

Several game companies can't wait to take an established franchise and expand it across genres, hoping to trade on a name to soak up gamer dollars. Interplay slapped "Descent" on the front of Freespace even though it had little to do with the action series; MicroProse's X-COM series has gone from strategy to space sim and will soon be a first-person shooter. The next Ultima is Ascension, a first-person action-adventure game. What's next, a Tomb Raider RTS? Does it anger you when companies change a franchise's direction to a different genre? Do you feel robbed of sequels you want to play? Or is a franchise spreading its genre wings a natural evolution? Email your replies (and your name) to *pcgamesletters@pcgames.com*, or snail mail PC Games, 501 2nd St., Suite 500, San Francisco, CA 94107. One randomly picked letter-writer gets a free game and a *PC Games* T-shirt.

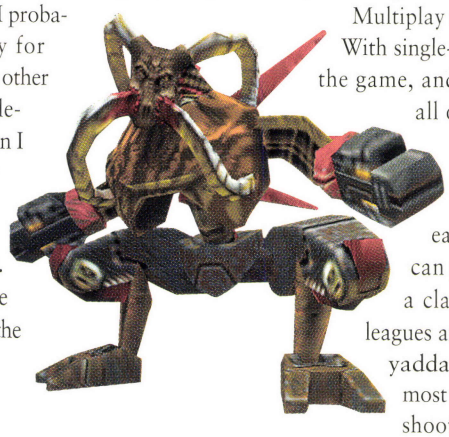
Shifting Shooters?

Your answers to September's Question of the Month, which asked how you felt about recent developments in first-person shooters, provoked answers from all angles. Opinions were pretty sharply divided as far as storyline. Some of you thought a good plot almost detracted from gameplay; at the other extreme, Carlton Chase, this month's prize-winner, noted: "The story has to be GOOD. Generic doesn't cut it. And the game should reflect the story." But we got letters from males, females, kids, and parents dealing with many aspects of FPSs, just going to show that what we value in the genre is as individual as the people who play. Read on...

It's about time 3D shoot-'em-ups have some hint of a plot and character development. Now, if we could only get Riven-type graphics and puzzles, with a 3D real-time engine...
Michael Jamus Angelo, via email

I could never play the Doom games for long because I'd become bored fast. But recent games—Hexen II, for example—have made me use my brain.

Of the newest crop of games, I'm looking forward to two. The first is Half-Life. Even if it's still based on the original Quake engine, I'll play it if it has great AI. I probably won't start multiplay for months after I beat it. The other is Daikatana, not for single-play but for multiplay. When I play Quake online, the only weapons I get are weak. In Quake II they're better, but they get boring after a while. If Daikatana really does have over 30 weapons, it'll be at the top of my list. Also, I like the story and can't wait to rescue Superfly from jail.
Vishan Chopra, via email



Leave storyline to the strategy gamers so they can sit there and calculate and think about all that junk. What we care about is realism and teamwork. Why do you think CTF and Team Fortress games have long surpassed deathmatch as the choice for experienced gamers? If we have a bud by our side who can help us accomplish a goal, that really makes the whole thing snap. That's why the game I anticipate the most by far is Half-Life, because it will finally give us the Team Fortress II that we've been waiting for.
Mark Myers, via email

Stories can never be emphasized too much; give them some respect, because it takes imagination and creativity to write them. On the other hand, the story doesn't really play a part in multiplayer gaming, which is, after all, why gamers buy certain games more than others. Multiplay is more important. With single-play, you conquer the game, and then...you do it all over again! At least with multiplay, you rampage against different people each time. Plus you can gain skills, start a clan or guild, form leagues and ladders, yadda yadda yadda. Luckily, most of the first-person shoot-'em-ups coming out this fall look promising.
Ingrid Catlin, via email

This shift in FPSs just proves that Quake and its brethren are a dying breed. These so-called "intelligent" FPSs are an attempt to draw in new audiences (those who prefer to think). But a kill-all-the-monsters game is a kill-all-the-monsters game no matter how smart the enemy or how complex the plot. The goal of these games has been the same since Castle Wolfenstein.
Kyle, via email

A great FPS can be played many times over. Sure, the multiplayer quotient is involved in that, but there's another thing involved too: editable code.

Nothing can compare to Quake. This game where you wield eight weapons and travel on foot to kill monsters and soldiers is transformed into a game where you fly an aircraft or drive a tank, like in AirQuake. Or ride a hoverboard down a slope in Slide. Drive great-looking cars in

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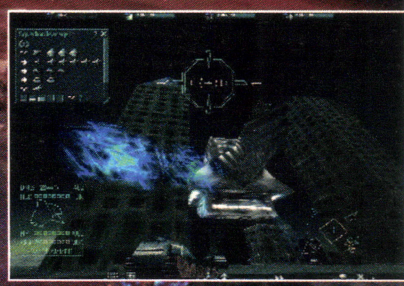

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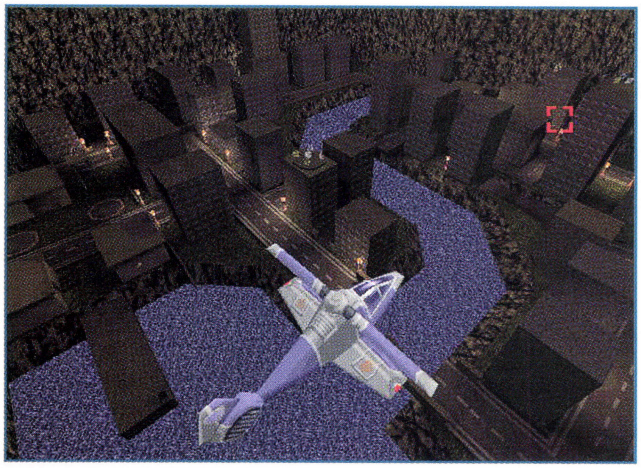

QRally. Play a Navy Seal in Navy Seals. Or get 24 weapons in the Killer Quake Patch, with cooperative bots and several extras. Quake's life will be eternal.
The Quamosity, via email

I've been reading the previews of upcoming shooters and haven't liked the emphasis on realism. I don't want to kill people, I want to frag aliens! Reading about pain skins and head shots makes me uneasy. I didn't even like the close-up marksman's crosshairs available in Jedi Knight—again, too close to killing people.

I'm not one of those who believes Quake II causes mass murder, but I am a parent of two young boys, and when I play QII, it's after they've been safely tucked in bed. But every once in awhile, I've just got to fire up the PC and try to bust out of that dead-end hallway I left in frustration the night before. And if my kids walk in while I'm fraggin' away, I'd rather they see Papa gibbing a Stroggos monster than exploding some guy's head and leaving realistic blood-spatters on the wall. Guess I'm just another pacifist gamer.
Mike Anderson, via email

Dark Returns

Do any of you guys remember the Alone in the Dark trilogy? I loved it and have all three. Do you know whether Infogrames is making an Alone in the Dark IV? I've also heard that this new entry might be a three-part adventure.
Aragorn, via email

Glad you asked. In fact, Infogrames does plan to bring back Alone in the Dark. For those of you who haven't heard of it, the series of 3D action-adventures from the early and mid-'90s set the stage for games like Tomb Raider and Resident Evil. The games cast the player as a private investigator up against such enemies as Lovecraftian monsters, pirates, and gunslingers on a Wild West movie set. An SVGA version of the game engine was used for Knight's Chase, but since then, Alone in the Dark has remained...well, alone in the dark. Details on the fourth AitD are virtually nonexistent at this stage—except that it's due in late 1999. —*Eds.*

You Whine, I'll Kill

"I'm a female gamer, and I like Tomb Raider!!" Yeah, so? Shut up and play.

Tomb Raider III is on the horizon, and like many girls, I'm pumped up about it. But I'm not parading around saying things to the effect of "I'm female! Look at me! I can press keys on the keyboard and play games! Aren't I special?"

TR was great for giving the official butt-kickin' job to a female. True, as expected, the male audience caused Lara Croft to sport swimming suits along with other small outfits that show off her admittedly amazing figure. And there's some girl gamers out there whining about it. But that's only because of their ignorance. The videogame industry is hugely male, and the games will cater to them. Most girl gamers don't seem to realize this.

TRIII will cause more foldouts in magazines and probably parts of TRIII will have her with even less clothing than in the previous TRs. I only ask the majority of female gamers to get off their ego-trip, realize that there's a reason for the way TR is done, and learn to play well. And for the true lady gamers out there—play your games. And don't dare give an inch to the guys.
Jocelyn Marie Anderson, via email

DX6!

I just downloaded DX6 today from Microsoft. I have never had a gaming experience like this before. I decided to go back to good old faithful Wipeout 2097 and see what it did. It did a lot! The blue beam from the back of the ship didn't have the polygon splits it had before, but rather a nice round beam which looked even better than the PSX version. And instead of 19 fps to 26 fps, I got 26 fps to 36 fps—I was shocked. Instead of playing the game, I constantly looked at the frame rates and the blue beam. And these are only two of many improvements. Well, I'm off to play some great games with great graphics and motion. Get DX6!
Marcel Mabhena, via email

Whoops

Yup, we whacked the ball straight into the pond on this one. In September's "State of the Game" feature, we mistakenly listed Sierra's upcoming PGA Championship Golf, 1999 Edition, under its original title, Golf Pro 99, and identified the publisher as Empire Interactive. Actually, Empire doesn't have an upcoming golf game, though they're the publisher of the currently available The Golf Pro game.

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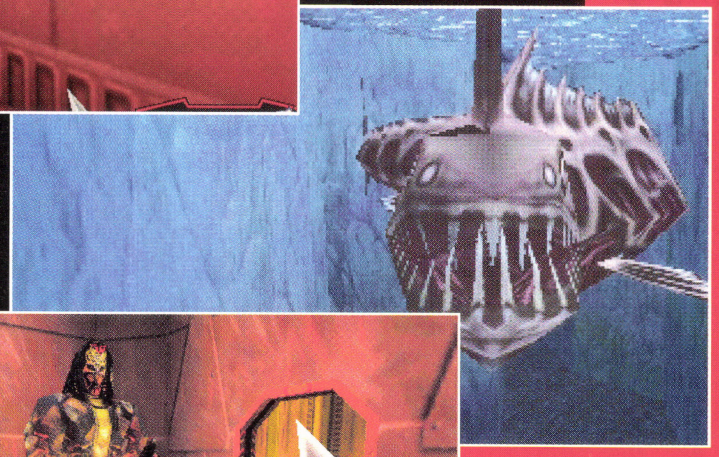

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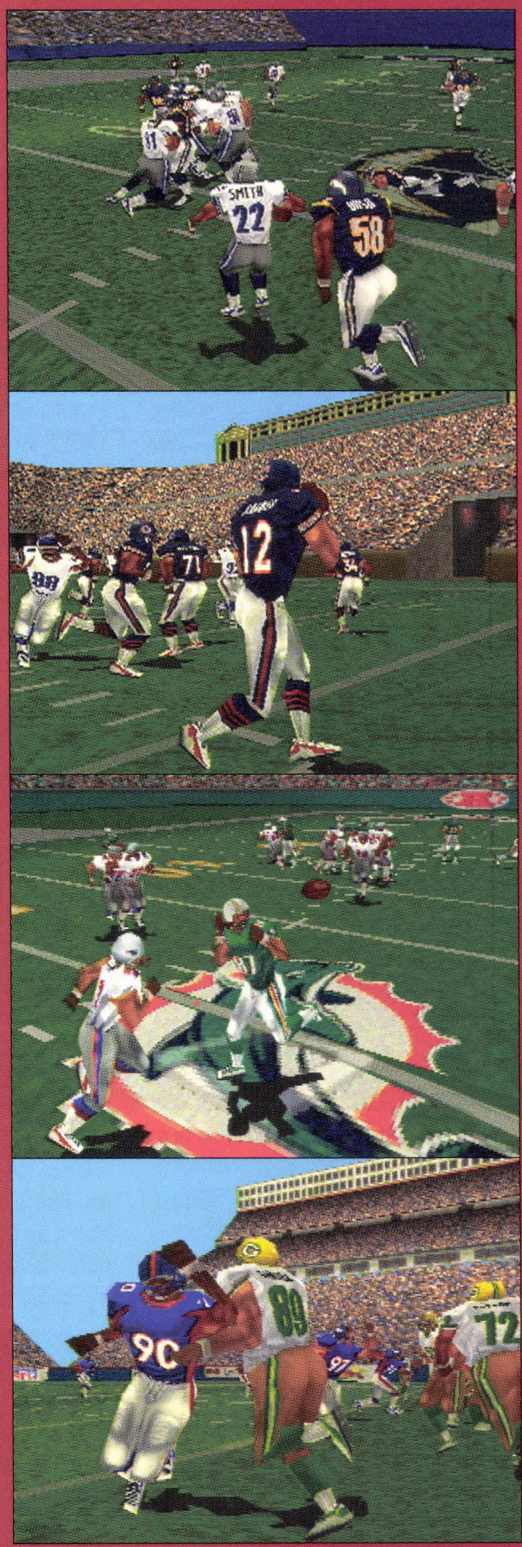

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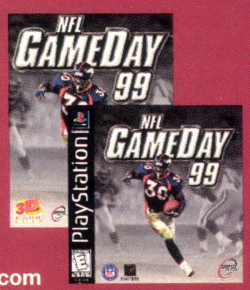

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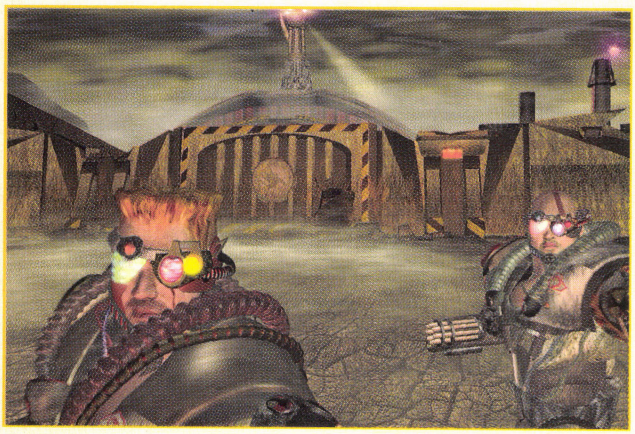
GAME WIRE

The Bigger They Are, The Farther They Sprawl

By Peter Olafson

They don't laugh at Barbie anymore. Toy giant Hasbro, fresh from its spring purchase of Atari, announced that it's chowing down both MicroProse and Avalon Hill Game Company. Not to be outdone, Electronic Arts, home of Madden, recently purchased key assets of Virgin Interactive Entertainment, including Westwood Studios. And, apparently, Cendant bit off more than it could chew—sending signals that it's looking to sell off its recently acquired software unit, which includes Sierra On-Line and Blizzard Entertainment.



Westwood and Virgin are marching to a new commander.

EA Takes Virgin

In the largest of the deals, EA will pay $122.5 million for Las Vegas–based Westwood Studios (developers of the Command & Conquer and Lands of Lore series), Virgin's Irvine, California, studio, and the rights to publish games that Virgin currently has in development—including the latter's profitable European distribution operation.

Assuming the pact is approved, Westwood is expected to continue with business as usual under the EA umbrella. Westwood founders Brett Sperry and Louis Castle have signed five-year contract extensions, and EA hopes to hit the scheduled release dates for Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun and Lands of Lore III.

"It's just a perfect setup for us," says EA spokeswoman Pat Becker. "We don't want to interfere with something that's working well."

She expects that Westwood, for its part, will benefit from EA's worldwide distribution network, the industry's largest. However, Becker says it's too early to say which VIE games will be published under the EA name.

Those games, which are currently being evaluated, include racers Superbike World Championship and Professional Sports Car Racing; Duel: The Mage Wars (an action/strategy game from the creators of X-COM); Dawn of War (a real-time strategy game set in a prehistoric world); Recoil (a tank-based shooter from Zipper Interactive); F-16 Aggressor (a flight sim from General Simulations Incorporated); and Swords & Sorcery (an RPG from D.W. Bradley, the designer of Wizardrys V through VII).

And what of the remainder of Virgin? Nancy Bushkin, a spokeswoman for Virgin's parent company, the Spelling Entertainment Group, confirmed Virgin is still a publisher, though a significantly smaller one. She also says Virgin still has a European development studio (with a number of its own games in the pipe) and distribution network, a US sales and marketing unit, and an extensive back-catalog of titles. Bushkin indicated Spelling is "evaluating its options" for these properties.

Upcoming MicroProse games like Klingon Honor Guard won't be delayed.

Hasbro's acquisition of MicroProse may put Agents of Justice back on the release list.

Hasbro Game Designer

Hasbro is set to acquire MicroProse in a deal valued at about $70 million and the Avalon Hill Game Company for $6 million. Hasbro Interactive chief Tom Dusenberry indicated that the acquisitions are designed to bolster Hasbro's strength in the strategy and action genres. The established franchises in MicroProse's repertoire—from Star Trek to Magic: The Gathering—and in Avalon Hill's 275-game board-game catalog were "critical" to the deals, he says.

MicroProse had been struggling with fallout from an abortive 1997 merger with GT Interactive. On the day the deal with Hasbro was announced, MicroProse announced a net loss of $7.8 million for the first quarter of its 1999 fiscal year—including a $431,000 one-time charge for the closing of its Austin, Texas, studio.

"The beauty of the deal is that it's a very fast one," says Angela Edwards, MicroProse's director of public relations. "It's an all-out cash buy, which creates a lot less red tape on the government side," she said, comparing it to a merger. At the earliest, the deal could be completed by mid-September—November at the latest, she says.

Edwards says the acquisition is a positive step. "It's not fun to struggle," she says. "[The purchase] puts the focus back on the development of games... It puts the questions aside, puts the corporate business to bed, and allows employees to focus on product development."

continued on page 38

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Covert Ops

Expect 3D combat in Imperium Galactica II.

Imperium Follow-Up

Hungarian developer Digital Reality is working on a sequel to Imperium Galactica—working title: Imperium Galactica II—for release via GT Interactive in spring 1999. Imperium Galactica, the sequel to Reunion, allowed the player to assume greater and greater levels of responsibility for fleet ops. No solid details yet—but the screens we saw (like the one above) suggest the battles will be carried out in 3D.

Activision's upcoming Asteroids redux will be followed by a Space Invaders update.

Anyone for Pong?

Activision continues in its fascination with nostalgia. With Battlezone in stores and an update of Asteroids due next month, Activision has now licensed the rights to create games based on Space Invaders. The publisher aims to maintain the 20-year-old cabinet classic's addictiveness while updating it with "cutting-edge technology" and "explosive graphics," according to a press release. The original Taito game—a spiritual antecedent of Centipede—reportedly rang up more than $500 million in revenues (at least $200 million of it from me alone) on systems ranging from coin-op to Atari 2600 to Game-Boy. However, details on the Activision version—slated to ship in 1999—weren't available. Can Mr. Do be far behind?

Seven Kingdoms + 15 Fryhtans = 7KII

Enlight Software's working on Seven Kingdoms II for release next spring via Interactive Magic. Expect this follow-up to the much-praised RTS to include a new 3D engine, new cultures and units, cooperative play, and 15 species of unpleasant creatures called the Fryhtans. The who? The Fryhtans used to be a bunch of dumb bunnies, but they've started to show signs of intelligence—developing their own civilization—and they're spreading across the map without the benefits of make-out music and mood lighting. To stop their advance, the kingdoms will have to pull together under one leader. If you're any good, that leader might be you.

On Approach for 1999

Looking Glass Technologies has taken the wraps off the third entry in its line of civilian flight-sims. Flight Unlimited III, slated for 1999 release via EA, is set over the Seattle area. You'll get to buzz the city's Space Needle and Mount Rainier's snowy peak, as well as visit Tacoma, Bellevue, and Redmond, a range of craggy coastlines, and the Olympic and Cascade mountain ranges. Chairman Bill's house is included, too.

"The first thing that grabs my eye is the terrain," says project director and lead designer Tom Sperry, who joined Looking Glass after working on Microsoft's Flight Simulator line. "I just love to fly through the mountains and the canyons. It's like flying. It's like being there."

The 16-bit, photorealistic terrain—about 10,000 square miles of it—is based on satellite data. FUIII will include five new aircraft: a seaplane, a sailplane, a sleek, home-built plane, a corporate jet, and what Sperry characterizes as a "250 mph Ferrari of general aviation." You'll be able to put them on autopilot, learn to fly them with an interactive instructor, and take orders from an improved air-traffic controller. The weather effects will include now-

Flight Unlimited III's stunning terrain.

realistic frontal movements with associated real-world weather effects such as snow, fog, haze, rain, lightning, and clouds. At night, the ground will be lit accurately. In addition, an enhanced graphics engine will allow animation of ground objects like boats, cars, and airport vehicles. And, with FUII scenery, you'll be able to fly down to San Francisco. (We're the sleep-deprived bunch on 2nd St. Wave!)

—Peter Olafson

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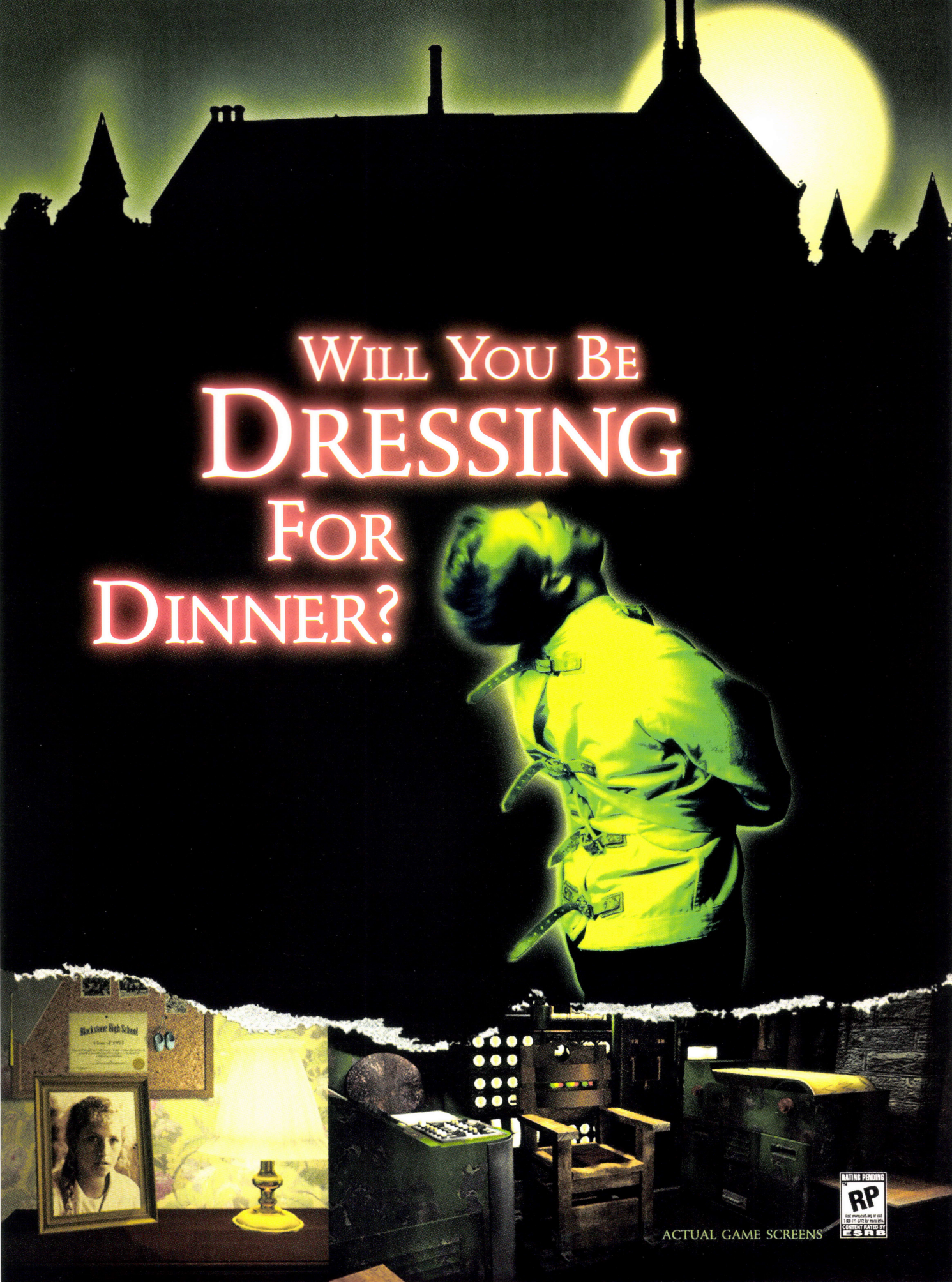
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FOR
DINNER?
ACTUAL GAME SCREENS
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
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At the Wire

Slave Zero is the kind of shoot-'em-up Accolade's now focusing on.

Accolade Sticks to Action

Accolade is still playing HardBall. But it no longer knows Jack—Jack Nicklaus, that is. And don't look for it to get tied up in another Deadlock either. Instead, executives say, the company's new corporate philosophy is to publish action-oriented titles that translate easily to console—notably, the Sony PlayStation. The company plans no further strategy or sports titles, except for its long-running baseball franchise.

"The action titles are really where the market is, particularly the international sales," says Jim Barnett, Accolade's president and CEO. "And they're where our passion is."

"PC development offers us a great place to hone tomorrow's console technology," says marketing chief Stan Roach. "The committed, hardcore PC gamer can tell us if a game is good or not. They're our core customer."

Accolade's next batch of action titles includes Test Drive 5 and Test Drive Off-Road 2. StarCon, an action-oriented offshoot of the Star Control universe, is also slated for Christmas, along with the futuristic gang-warfare title Redline. And due early next year is the action romp Slave Zero, in which players assume control of a 60-foot robot on a rampage through a hostile 21st-century metropolis.

Infection Detection

Life imitates art. MGM Interactive has offered to provide clean CDs and virus protection programs to owners of its 3D RTS game, WarGames— which celebrates hacker culture in its gameplay. WarGame's original production run is infected with the Win32/Marburg.a virus. The game can be played safely, as the virus resides only in the electronic registration program and not in the game files themselves, according to an MGM Interactive spokesperson.

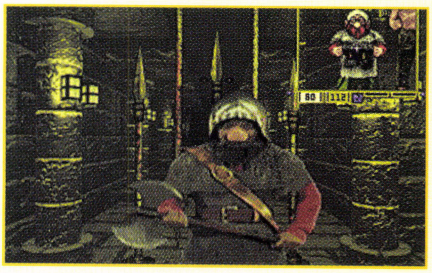
Users are urged not to launch the registration program. The infection apparently originated when the game's English developer used an infected demo CD that was accidentally distributed with the July 1998 edition of a British games magazine, says marketing director Justine Rosenheck. The game was virus-checked by the developer, by MGM Interactive, and by an outside testing firm, but the infection went undetected because Win32/Marburg.a was too new at the time.

Win32/Marburg.a is a "polymorphic" virus that infects Windows 95 and 98 executable files. When the infected file is run, it searches for other executables to infect in the current directory, the Windows directory, and the System directory. When later activated at a random date, it displays an error screen: a red cross on a white circle. Programs that can detect the virus include Symantec Norton Anti-Virus (which can be downloaded from the WarGames Web site at **www.wargamesmgm.com**); Dr. Solomon Anti-Virus (**www.drsolomon.com**); and F-PROT (**www.commandcom.com**). MGM Interactive is contacting users who have registered the game electronically about the problem and is responding to phoned-in inquiries, says Rosenheck. About 400 users had registered electronically by late August, and about 200 people have contacted MGM Interactive directly about the virus.

Aaghh! WarGames shipped with a virus.

Alternate Plans

Monolith Productions is no longer involved in the Alternate Reality Online project, but the publisher reportedly has almost finished the design for an online game of its own. Running under the LithTech engine, this action/RPG is said to use a 3D, isometric point of view similar to Myth's and offer the ability to trade spells between characters. And the delivery date is way out there: January 2000.



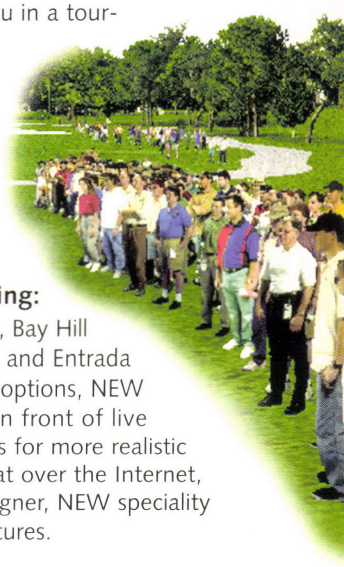
A sequel to Stonekeep is due next year.

But Will It Have a Pretty Box?

Interplay wasn't saying anything official at press time but acknowledged that its RPG division, Black Isle Studios, is working on a follow up to Stonekeep for release next spring. The original Stonekeep, released in 1995, was famously late, but it balanced its somewhat dated technology with a meticulous design. An interesting nugget circulating in the industry says Stonekeep II will use the Fallout 3 engine.

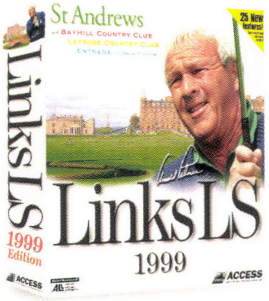
continued on page 38

New Tournament Environment—immerses you in a tournament atmosphere with galleries of thousands to cheer your every shot! Realistic details include spectators, crowd noises, press, photographers and much more!



New Courses, and other new features including: St Andrews Links Old Course, Bay Hill Club & Lodge, Latrobe C.C. and Entrada at Snow Canyon, 3 swing options, NEW Tournament Mode (play in front of live galleries), NEW 3D objects for more realistic play, NEW real-time voice chat over the Internet, NEW mode of play (MOP) game designer, NEW speciality shots, NEW caddy book and more exciting features.

Links LS 1999



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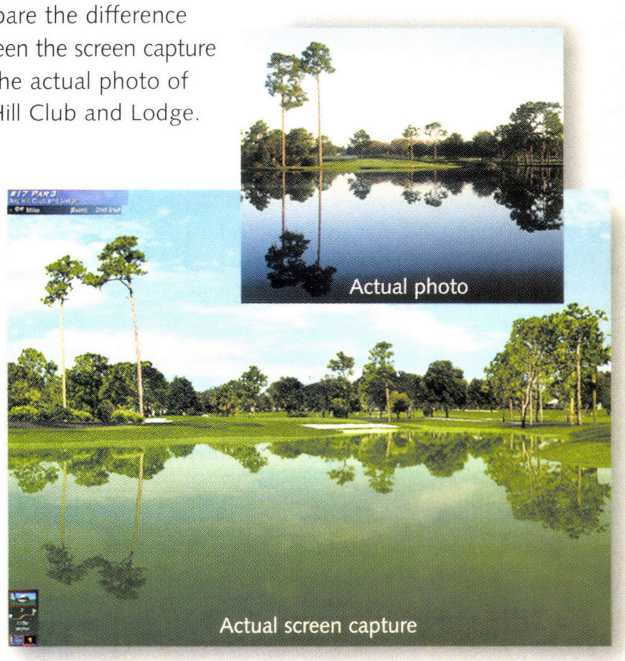
Is It Real Or Is It Links LS '99?

Compare the difference between the screen capture and the actual photo of Bay Hill Club and Lodge.



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continued from page 36

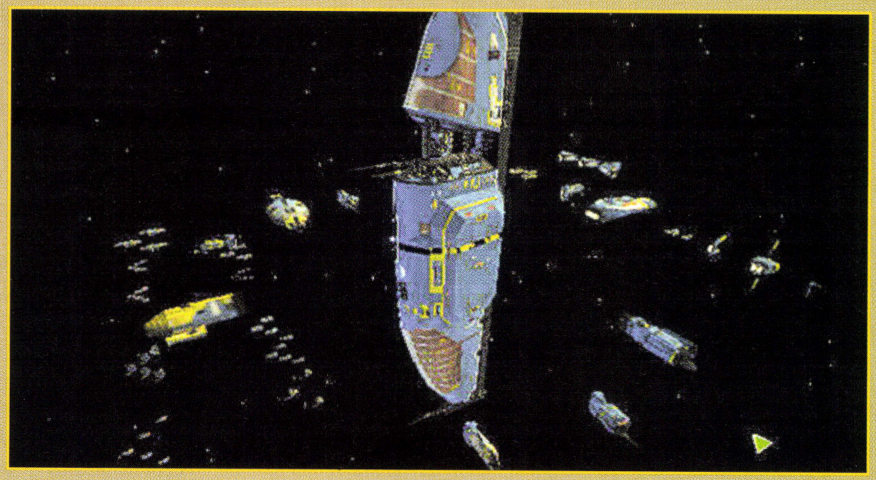
Deaths in the Family

Two respected computer-game designers have passed away recently. On July 3, in a Little Rock, Arkansas, hospice, Dani Bunten Berry lost her struggle with lung cancer; and on May 28, a day shy of his 38th birthday, Bill Williams died at home in Rockport, Texas, of complications from cystic fibrosis and diabetes.

Berry, 49, president of Ozark Softscape, was uniquely associated with online and multiplayer games. As Dan Bunten (prior to a 1992 sex-change operation), the designer was responsible for many of Electronic Arts' great early games, including the beloved M.U.L.E, Seven Cities of Gold, the multiplayer-only Robot Rascals, and Modem Wars. Later, he was credited with MicroProse's Command HQ and Global Conquest. Most recently, as Dani Berry, the developer completed the online game WarSport for TimeSink and an unpublished redesign of M.U.L.E. for Internet play. You can read Berry's own account of her career in computer games at a memorial Web site (**www.mpath.com/dani/personal/biz/memoir.htm**).

Williams' forte was replayability—making games that were a little different each time you booted them. "I tried really hard to make an interesting mistake," Williams said of his design philosophy in an interview last year. "And then I developed the mistake." His early efforts—Salmon Run, Necromancer, and Alley Cat—were conceived for the Atari 800. In 1984, Williams discovered the Amiga and wrote Mindwalker, Sinbad and the Throne of the Falcon, Pioneer Plague, and—what many consider to be his masterpiece—Knights of the Crystallion for that machine before moving to consoles. He finally left the industry to attend seminary in 1992. In his last months, he put the finishing touches on an autobiography disguised as theological fiction titled *Naked Before God* (Morehouse Publishing).

—Daniel Morris and Peter Olafson



The many design studios of Sierra may be searching for a new home.

Bigger cont.

She expects that MicroProse will proceed with its fall release schedule. European Air War and Klingon Honor Guard should have surfaced by the time you read this; Top Gun: Hornet's Nest is due in October and Birth of the Federation in November. (A precise date hasn't been set for Falcon 4.0.)

MicroProse's studios will remain independent under Hasbro, but its sales, marketing, and administration will be merged into Hasbro Interactive. This will ultimately mean layoffs, but Dusenberry says it's too early to say how many.

Dusenberry says he wants to restore MicroProse to the greatness he feels was lost when the publisher was acquired by Spectrum HoloByte in 1993. He says that effort would include reaching out to established designers from MicroProse's golden era. And he says Hasbro will look into resurrecting two titles that pre-Hasbro MicroProse canceled: the superhero RPG Guardians: Agents of Justice and Star Trek: First Contact.

Dusenberry expects that MicroProse will benefit from Hasbro's deep pockets and marketing and distribution muscle. "I think, just by not being broke, we'll help them," he says. Hasbro's annual revenues are around $3.5 billion, and Hasbro Interactive, a relative newcomer to this market, is already No. 4 in computer-game sales, thanks to titles like Monopoly and Frogger.

While Hasbro Interactive does plan to maintain an Avalon Hill computer-games line, Dusenberry says Hasbro won't pursue development of the two AH games—TacOps '98 and Freedom in the Galaxy—in development when the agreement was struck.

"We plan to start from scratch," he says. "We think we can do a better job of it."

In the short term, Dusenberry says Hasbro will focus on integrating its new acquisitions. While he wouldn't discuss specifics, he says Hasbro's wallet is still open.

Sierra Gives Cendant Indigestion

Sierra, one of the industry's ripest plums, hasn't fallen—but it's reportedly swinging. According to *The Wall Street Journal*'s Interactive Edition, Cendant Corporation has enlisted an advisor to analyze alternatives for a public offering or the outright sale of Cendant Software. Indeed, Cendant's most recent quarterly report, issued in August, already lists the software unit among "discontinued operations."

In 1996, before merging with HFS Inc. to form Cendant, CUC International acquired Sierra and Davidson & Associates (of which Blizzard was a part) for $1.7 billion in stock. The unit sold an industry-leading 5.16 million units of computer games in 1997, according to PC Data, and generated $650 million in revenues during 1997.

A Cendant spokesman didn't respond to inquiries about the pending sale, but financial analysts are abuzz over the prospects.

"We've seen consolidation in this industry for years now," says Andrea Williams, an analyst with Volpe Brown Whelan, "and we'll continue to see consolidation. Cendant Software is a prize hanging out there that someone's going to claim."

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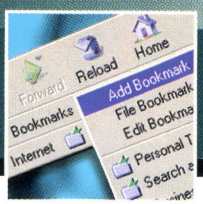
The Web's full of sites devoted to the gaming greats. Here are some of our favorite in-your-face URLs we bookmarked this month. If you visit or run a site that deserves mention, drop us a line at *sites@pcgames.com*.



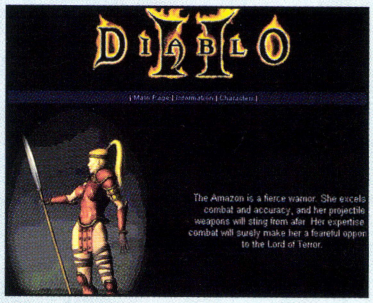
BOOKMARK THIS

By Danny W. Lam

Site of the Month: The Blizzard Games Consortium

www.blizzardgames.com

A fan site dedicated to a Blizzard game? How about one devoted to the entire company? These guys cover nothing but stuff from the makers of Diablo and Starcraft. Check out the frequently updated news and the Guild/Clan database, jump to the strategy page if you need a little help, subscribe to the Newsletter to have Blizzard-related news delivered to you via email, and cheer and jeer on the Rants and Raves page. You can even order a Blizzard game right on the spot. All the detailed, descriptive info you need on the company and its games can be found right here. Congrats to our Site of the Month!



The Urban Assault Vault

ua.battle-zone.com

Urban Assault fans will love this. Besides News and Game Info (with some nicely detailed building/vehicle descriptions), the UAV's got a Map Vault and a Strategies section. And really dedicated Urbanites can download movie trailers and music files.

Interstate 82

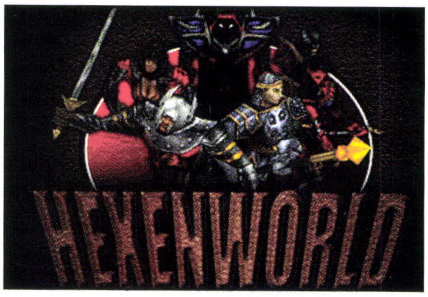
i82.com

The follow-up to Activision's popular Interstate '76 already has a loyal following, and this site is proof. Check out the Help for Newbies page, hook up with Community Links, send your gripes to the Disco Vigilantes Message Board, and get all the latest news on the game. It's totally rad, dude!

Trespasser: Raptor's Den

trespasser.gameplex.net

The up-and-coming Trespasser has a lot of people drooling, and the Den is a great place to satisfy your cravings. Of course there are screenshots, sounds, info on the engine, and an interview with the makers of the game—but you also get nifty extras like polls and an Ask Xynder page, where the webmaster responds to queries about the game.



Hexenworld

www.hexenworld.com

This is Hexen/Heretic heaven. If you're looking for the latest news on Heretic II or need stuff on Hexen or Heretic, this is the place to go. It has articles, mods, a walkthrough, a server database, and links to webrings and other sites.

The Descent Chronicles

descent.gamestats.com/index.shtml

Here's a site with all the dirt you need for Volition's popular space-sim, Descent: Freespace. Snag some screenshots, download some files, scan through the FAQ, and don't leave without checking out the cool weapons/ships viewer.

Generation 3D Hardware and Gaming

www.gen3d.simplenet.com

Hard(ware) heads, listen up! These guys test out all the latest video and sound cards they can get their hands on, and even a couple of games here and there. They've got the latest news, editorials, previews, and interviews, and if you're in the market for a new 3D card, you've got to link to the 3D Pricewatch page.

GameGirlz.Com

www.gamegirlz.com

Who says there aren't any girl gamers? This site is living proof that there are female gamers out there dedicated to delivering the beat-down. Check out the Women Spotlights for interviews with women in the gaming industry, go to the GG Online Gaming page and hook up with a fellow gamer, visit the Female Quake Players Ring, and meet the staff of this great site.

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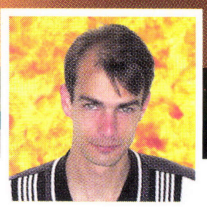
THREE-DOT BUZZ



Item, item, hoozgotta item?

WILLEM KNIBBE

Sorry, Herb

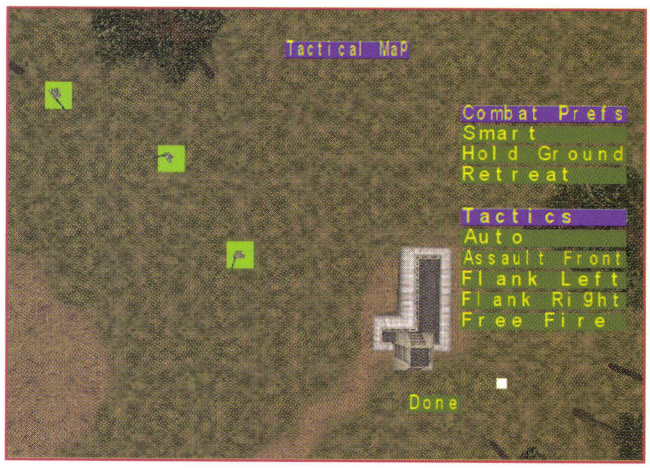
OK, there, I've done it—blatantly stolen the master's line with my call for an item. The master is Herb Caen, the man who perfected a style called three-dot journalism in a *San Francisco Chronicle* column he wrote daily for an amazing 58 years until his death in 1997.

Three-dot journalism isn't taught in university classes. Herb would just take news bits, info, observations, rumors, gossip, stories, and jokes and connect them with three dots—ellipses for you purists. Walter Winchell actually invented the style, but Herb made it all his own (go to **www.sfgate.com/columnists/caen/** for examples). His insight, humor, and style earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1996.

My goals aren't quite that lofty. (Do they give Pulitzers for game journalism? Nope, didn't think so.) I hope to entertain and inform, slip in the odd bit you might not have heard about yet, make you smile here and there.

And so, with full apologies to Herb, to press:

SHOOT ME: With Unreal's multiplayer code still borked beyond belief (surely the long-promised end-all, be-all patch will be out by the time you read this), I was searching for something new to satisfy my frag jones. Fortunately, reader Lucas Altman (and a few others) tipped me off to Action Quake 2, an awesome mod that makes Quake II feel like a John Woo flick. Real weapons, real armor, real fun. Get it at **action.telefragged.com**... Saw the Activision folks recently, and lemme say Heavy Gear II is looking even better than when we did last month's cover story. They just incorporated this beautiful top-down tactical map that lets you plot waypoints for team members, assign formations, and give 'em orders. I can't wait to set up my perfect ambush in multiplay and start blastin' fools with those wicked smoke-trailing swarm missiles.



An alpha peek at Heavy Gear II's tactical map.

Is it just me, or is fighting in third-person tough? It worked for Jedi saber duels, but I was having trouble getting the hang of it while playing an early version of Heretic II multiplay. Maybe it was just because they hadn't implemented a crosshair yet. That game sure has beautiful environments and spell effects, and yeah, you can still be turned into a chicken (as Raven's Dan Freed proved on me)...How come in Rainbow Six you can't lie down—or move when you're crouched? Pretty obvious oversights in a fun game. I must've played that first mission 10 times trying to finish it without anyone on my team getting killed. Then I decided if Red Storm can't spell it, I don't need him—the "Austrailian" was my only loss, and on I went.

BIZ JUNK: Who did EA beat out for Westwood? Apparently the bidding went til the morning of the announcement, when Gates put his Microsoft money back in his wallet and EA forked over $122.5 mil...So after EA rolls most of Virgin's stuff into the Westwood deal, about all that's left of Virgin is its good foreign distribution. Look for it to get acquired by someone who needs it, like Midway perhaps... Favorite acquisition rumors: EA to buy Blizzard (could happen); Crystal Dynamics to buy Eidos (huh? someone from Eidos just laughed and said, "Maybe *we'll* buy *them*." That's more than just a maybe, other sources said); Eidos to buy Psygnosis (negotiations were continuing at press time, sources said); Nintendo to buy Sega (OK, that's an old one, but it *still* cracks me up)...Seems everyone in Washington is crossing their fingers and hoping a Microsoft or EA or Hasbro isn't interested: Sierra employees want that IPO.

CLASS ACT: In this age of game-designer ego, it was refreshing to see Chris Taylor (yeah, the Total Annihilation guy who just moved into his new Gas Powered Games offices) hanging out in front of a Seattle arcade that was hosting a Sierra event, chatting amiably with everyone who recognized him (lots did) and humbly accepting kudos for TA. (He actually said, "Well, I had a great team, you know," to one gushing admirer.) Let's hope he remains so accessible and personable in the wake of his distribution deal—Microsoft has a way of shielding its developers...Daikatana's delayed til next year, but at least Romero's not dead (as Adrenaline Vault reported, then quickly retracted)...How many programmers does it take to change a light bulb? A team of 20, and the producer says they're hoping to have it done by Christmas, but you never can tell with these things...How many game journalists does it take to change a light bulb? Hmm, wait, I think that info's in the press release here somewhere.

Item, item, yougotta item? Send it to buzz@pcgames.com.

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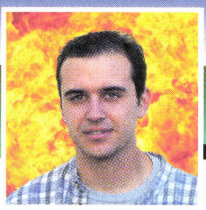
NO Esc



DANIEL MORRIS

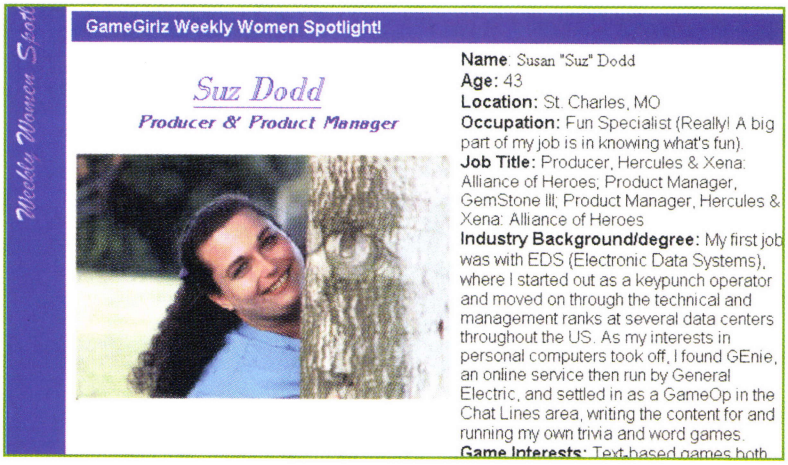
Gamer Web sites change the relationship between creator and consumer

A Web of Influence

Gamers matter. Each month, No Esc will look at how individual gamers are influencing the industry at every level—from the Web pundits whose spare-time sites become industry signposts, to the amateur mod-makers and unit designers whose creations soon surpass those of the developers—to make the Gamer Revolution a reality.

Winston Churchill once said, "History will be kind to me, because I intend to write it." That attitude transfers over just about perfectly to gamers on the Web. A basic grasp of HTML (and an even less refined grasp of grammar) allows anyone to set up a Web site, and from there it's just a matter of filling that corner of cyberspace with your own brand of digital dogma.

The next great leap in the evolution of computer games is already well underway. And no, it's not strictly the multiplayer revolution. That's more or less a done deal. I'm talking about the increasing role of personal identity and expression that's customizing the stock gaming experience offered by publishers—the flexibility that lets every gamer individualize the game before sharing their personally tailored visions, and opinions, with the world.



GameGirlz includes profiles of industry females.

Games are the only mass-entertainment medium where the walls between creators and customers are tumbling. In fact, sometimes it's hard to tell where the job of creating the game ends—you could argue that many of today's most popular titles are so popular because they're delivered as raw material. It's what end users construct from this material (and the subsequent interchange of their ideas) that's making gamers as important to many developers as CEOs.

For those who don't believe that a Joe Schmoe with a Web site can carve out celebrity status, one need only tune in to FOX TV to get a gander at Matt Drudge. He's the cybergossip whose less-than-reliable Web site, the Drudge Report, has become required reading in the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. We're talking about an online rumor mill launched from Drudge's bedroom that now has the power to convulse national headlines.

Individual gamers are beginning to find that it's possible to wield the same kind of influence equipped with nothing more than an ISP connection and a few megs of Web space. In the Age of Connectivity, a site like Blue's News (**www.bluesnews.com**) proves that big influence can come from nowhere. The importance of this site to gaming professionals really can't be overstated, as developers and company flacks jockey for prime positions in the daily listings of industry announcements.

Better examples of what the future holds for gamers, however, rest in the more idiosyncratic visions. Vangie Beal, "Aurora" of the all-girl Clan PMS, maintains GameGirlz at **www.gamegirlz.com** with the help of Planet Quake. She launched her site intending to provide a resource for female gamers and has used the space to organize online tournaments and get up on an editorial soapbox, taking the industry to task for its more-than-occasional marginalization of women.

Aurora's inspiration for GameGirlz comes from emails from guys complaining that girls shouldn't have any interest in gaming, especially the Quake-type stuff she loves so much.

"The sad thing is, with today's computer-games market overflowing with 'games created for girls' full of things like dolls, make-up, boys, and fashion, this kind of theory is common," she says. "When you add that to the image of the beautiful, sexy, no-brains bimbo chick the computer-gaming industry likes to promote, it's no wonder people look at me funny when I say I play games like Quake and Dark Reign."

These sites may seem like small ripples now, but that little chaos butterfly has a habit of coming home to developers' doors. Most, if not all, industry developers spend a part of every day surfing gamer sites both large and small to keep in touch with the ever-shifting community their products serve. That places a lot of power in your hands.

Right or wrong, informed or ignorant, rebellious or collaborative, we will help shape the growth of our hobby—and a multibillion dollar industry—more closely and personally than individual consumers have ever been able to before. And the industry folks can't grumble about it.

History will be kind to us, because we intend to write it.

Send your comments to NoEsc@pcgames.com.

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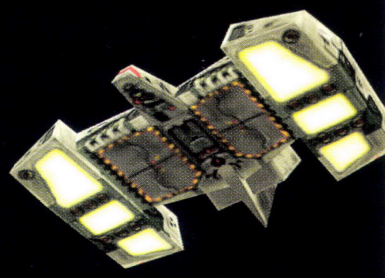
The Next Revolution



By Willem Knibbe

The first wave of hybrid strategy/action games went over gamers' heads, garnering critical acclaim but poor sales. Developers think they've figured out what they did wrong, and they're poised to make the genre explode into prominence with the second wave.

Stupid Weasels aren't worth jack against those damn planes. BLAM, one dies and I'm behind the wheel of the next one—just in time to eat a rocket. I'm now in the last of the squad, hopelessly firing at the beast planes when BLAM, a Ghargoil helicopter drops its payload on me. Guess I can write off the Northwest key sector. The South and East key sectors fell to them about a half-hour ago.

I hop back to base and crank out some more helicopters as I hear the unnervingly calm voice of my computer—"Unit under attack."

Where? Oh crap, I'm about to lose the Stoudson again.

"Stoudson Bomb, lost."

I hop into one of my six light tanks two sectors away from the Stoudson bomb. It's counting down again—1:21, 1:20, 1:19—and it's heavily guarded by Tekh-Trak Ghorkov tanks

"Power Station under attack."

F4 gets me back to my host station. I select the tank squad in the Squadron Manager and send them at the Stoudson, though I know it's hopeless—0:58, 0:57, 0:56—while I quickly crank out some helicopters and Fox anti-air tanks to fend off the planes attacking my power station.

I jump back into the tanks and manage to capture the Stoudson with 0:22 to spare.

"Host Station under attack."

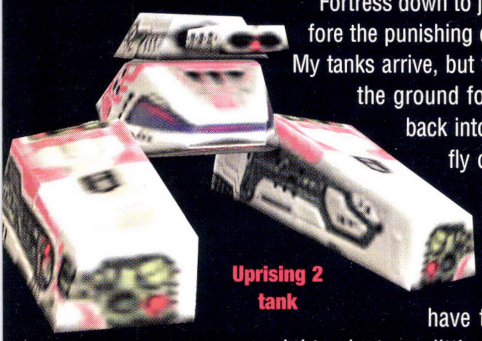
Argh! Leave me alone! F4 gets me back to base, and I can see those damn Ghorkov spy satellites hovering nearby. Their planes are hammering away at my station, and here comes a squadron of tanks. I build four Wasp helicopters and take out the tanks while my flak gun and three anti-air tanks obliterate the planes before they manage to completely destroy my power station. My energy production is now at just 60 percent—one more attack and my power station's toast, and here come four more planes. I'm about ready to hit Restart when *poof*, the planes disappear.

The Stoudson Bomb, when it detonates, sends a wall of flame that decimates everything in its path. (Urban Assault)

Ahhh, thank you, Taerkests. A huge fleet of Leonid tanks just took out the Ghorkov Host Station. I have a couple minutes to regroup and don't want to waste time. I prepare to show my gratitude by producing as many attack helicopters as my energy reserves allow. It's now or never. I put every single unit I have in one squadron, set the aggressiveness level

to two, hop in the squad leader, and lead them down to where my spy satellites revealed the location of the Taerkest Flying Fortress.

The Fortress is weak, and it's no wonder, with all the units it's just produced. My first helicopter pounds away at it before getting annihilated. I jump automatically into the second helicopter and get the Fortress down to just two squares of health before the punishing defensive guns obliterate me. My tanks arrive, but they're getting chewed up by the ground forces. I switch from the tank back into a helicopter and manage to fly over the base without getting hit, then fire, fire, fire missile after missile. BOOM, I get taken out by a Firebat. Now in the fourth helicopter, I have the Fortress squarely in my sights. Just one little green square of health left. Four missiles hit it, and a fifth, but its defensive guns have me targeted and I rock backward with the impact of its first shot. One more and my last helicopter's gone, but my sixth missile hits and BOOOOOOOOOOOM.



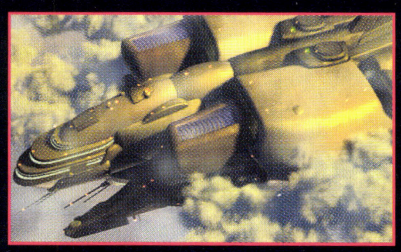
Uprising 2 tank

"Enemy host station destroyed."

Awwwwwww, yeah! I wipe the sweat from my brow, take a deep breath, and exhale a heavy sigh of relief and satisfaction. Finally I dare look at the clock. D'oh! It's 2:23 a.m. It took me over four hours and countless restarts to beat that mission.

Straction—stupid word, or next big thing?

I've experienced the same adrenaline rush, excitement, and immersiveness of that Urban Assault mission—Drak, one of the earlier ones in the nonlinear campaign—in Uprising and Battlezone scenarios. Those games were the first in an emerging genre we think could be The Next Big Thing.



The Uprising 2 Wraith will have plenty of firepower.

The hybrid strategy/action genre—we're calling it straction for brevity—seems to have all the elements. At their best, straction games combine the mental gymnastics, resource management, and war-general tactics of real-time strategy with the mayhem, carnage, and visceral impact of first-person action games. You manage a war from the classic RTS top-down perspective maps, plus engage the enemy from behind the wheel of your tank (in Battlezone and Uprising) or from the cockpit of any unit (in Urban Assault).

It seems to be the logical melding of today's two most popular genres. So why haven't straction games taken off? In an industry where selling 100,000 games is the bottom rung on the success ladder, none of those games has broken the 55,000 mark domestically—despite extensive marketing campaigns and near universal critical acclaim.

Uprising as to Dune 2

Cyclone Studios (Uprising), Activision (Battlezone), and Microsoft (Urban Assault) developers and marketing reps all provided the same analogy to explain sales that, as we politely let them put it, "didn't meet expectations." (The jury's still out on the recently released Urban Assault.)

Battlezone's graphics are even more stunning after a Voodoo II patch.

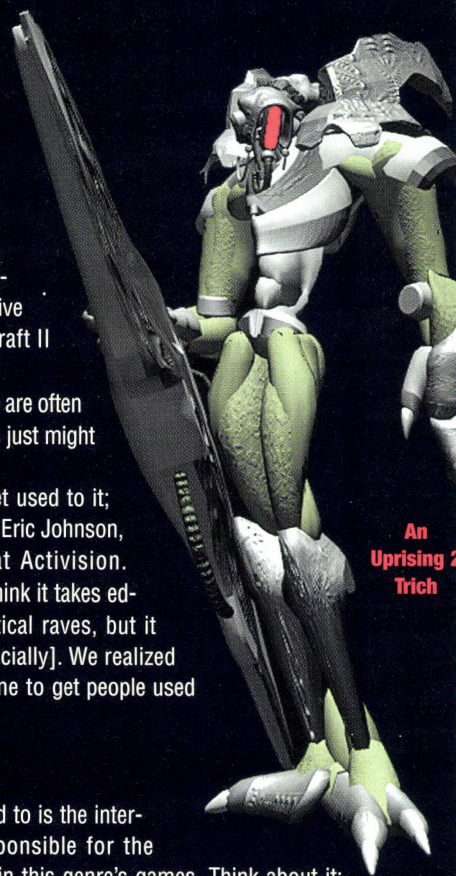
Invariably, the analogy went like this: Remember Dune 2? Remember when that RTS game was launched? Gamers fretted. "Hey, this isn't turn-based. There's going to be too much to do." It didn't sell that well out of the gate even with a recognizable license and a brave, fun new concept. Warcraft didn't fly off the shelves, either.

Finally, Command & Conquer and Warcraft II broke through. Building on the successes and fixing the shortcomings of their precursors, those games struck a chord with gamers, and now the RTS genre is one of the biggest in the industry.

"Sometimes you have to wait to get all the elements in alignment," says Evan Margolin, Cyclone's cofounder and director of development. "It took four or five titles before C&C and Warcraft II became household names."

First games in a new genre are often bearers of a message gamers just might not be ready to hear.

"The consumer has to get used to it; it's a whole new thing," says Eric Johnson, senior VP of marketing at Activision. "We're betting on that. We think it takes education. Battlezone had critical raves, but it could have done better [financially]. We realized that it was going to take time to get people used to this category."



An Uprising 2 Trich

Interface Race

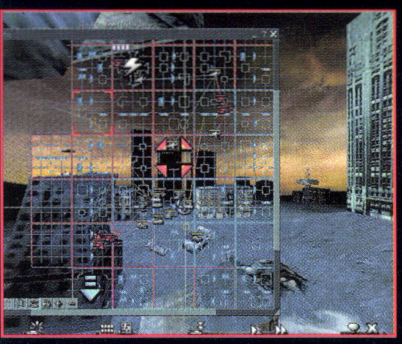
The biggest thing to get used to is the interface, which is largely responsible for the rather high learning curves in this genre's games. Think about it: How many keys do you use in your favorite first-person shooter? You

have keys bound for movement, firing, jumping, ducking, switching weapons, and probably more. In RTS games, you need keys to easily select and group units, plus issue a variety of commands to them. You need to build resource collectors and factories, then have an easy way to tell the factories what you want them to build. And you need quick access to a map that provides crucial information.

Now slap the two together and, without some careful planning, you could easily end up with more keyboard shortcuts than keys on a standard keyboard.

"When merging genres, by definition it's a whole lot of stuff for one player to do," says Jonathan Sposato, Urban Assault's producer. "You have to work extra hard to make the user interface elegant, make the way you control things and the way you empower the user super, super easy. For better or worse, the typical gamer tends to have a high frustration level with too much gadgetry."

Take any of the first straction games and it's easy to criticize aspects of the interface and their gadgetry. Battlezone was a keyboard dance. Uprising had more than 60 keyboard shortcuts. Urban Assault's unit control was inconsistent and difficult to remap.



Urban Assault's transparent, resizable map lets you command the war without going to a separate map-viewing screen.

Asking gamers to invest a lot of time just learning a game's language can quickly kill interest, especially for casual gamers.

"It scares people away," says John Eberhardt, Uprising 2's producer. "Now you must cater to the novice player if you want to make it more than a niche, a passing fad. Our strategy [with Uprising 2] is to have several missions force-feeding people the hotkeys with audio cues, bubble-text help. You must have under 30 hotkeys and a much more intuitive feel. In Uprising 1, Right-Control did one thing, Left-Control did something else."

Picking weapons and calling in troops is easier in Uprising 2.

We had a chance to play early versions of Uprising 2, and the interface is much more intuitive. The major new design feature is that, in a convention similar to Urban Assault's, you can hit the Shift key to bring up options easily accessible with the floating mouse cursor. For instance, you don't have to repeatedly click a key to cycle through your Wraith's numerous weapons systems. Now you click Shift, move the mouse to the weapon you want, and click. There, you've switched weapons. You can also use the Shift menu to call in troops, call in factories—execute just about every command in the game. While many of these choices will still be available via keyboard shortcuts, the floating mouse-cursor interface is much more intuitive when you're first learning the game, a boon for novices.

Your selected unit's location is clearly shown on the topographical map in Battlezone.

For the Battlezone team, the key word is accessibility. Pandemic, a new studio created by former Activision designer Josh Resnick, is developing Battlezone II for Activision. While in the early stages, they already have good plans in place for refining the interface.

"Our feeling in Battlezone is that its breakthrough was the interface and the way the menus interacted with the radar to get all the knowledge from a top-down view," says Peter Karpas, product manager at Activision. "We're going to keep that, but there are certain things to simplify. Battlezone's interface was designed for controlling a single unit. We found afterwards that people tend to use groups more than units. Now we're going to refine that so that the interface controls groups, then the next level down will control a single unit. It simplifies playing the game."

AI enhancements will put these units to work.

Hand in hand with improving interfaces is beefing up artificial intelligence so that the gamer doesn't have to micromanage every single unit. For instance, Battlezone II tanks will feature better pathing and collision avoidance, plus automatically pick up ammo and repair pods. Units in the next Urban Assault will automatically capture additional sectors and return to base when they need repairs.

Straction interfaces and AI will continue to evolve, much as they did in the RTS genre—hey, there was a time you couldn't group and command units via the now standard Control-1, Control-2 convention. As they continue to improve interfaces, expect straction developers to swipe other games' conventions that work.

Uprising 2 won't be so difficult as to alienate newbies.

Gamers' Games

Cyclone Studios freely admits Uprising, programmed by hardcore gamers obsessed with RTS games and Quake, was too hard. It was a game

Devourer:
Zerg Heavy Strike Flyer
Venomous creature spawned to cripple enemies with a discharge of corrosive poison.
Lurker:
Zerg Heavy Support Beast
Lumbering hulk, capable of burrowing and attacking from its underground lair.
MORE UNITS.
MORE WORLDS.
Medic:
Terran Field Surgeon
Battlefield support unit specializing in emergency medical care.
Valkyrie Bomber:
Terran Missile Frigate
Heavy support ship, designed for wide area damage.
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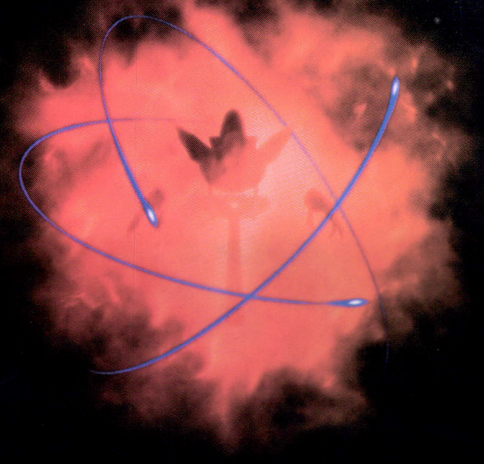

Corsair:
Protoss Support Fighter

AIR-TO-AIR ASSAULT UNIT EQUIPPED WITH NEUTRON FLARES AND DISRUPTION WEB GENERATOR.

Dark Archon:
Protoss Psionic Entity

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they could play just fine, but novice or intermediate players were often stymied early.

"There was a 90 percent upswing in difficulty after the fourth mission," says John Eberhardt, Uprising 2 producer. "People were frustrated too easily, another reason it didn't sell as well as it should have."

Urban Assault, created by four gamers in Germany, is similarly difficult, and even Battlezone received that criticism. Now the developers are making sure they include difficulty settings (duh!) in the next go-round, as well as gradually ratcheting up the challenge.

The design strategy in both the Uprising and Battlezone sequels is to heavily stress the in-your-face action early to draw gamers in, while slowly and subtly feeding them interface tutorials. As gamers master more of the interface conventions, tougher and more strategic missions will be presented.

Uprising 2 Triah Citadel

Other Lessons Learned

Despite having the fancy "director of development" title and being cofounder of a company that's now staffed with 80, it's obvious Cyclone's Margolin is a hardcore gamer. Boxes from the latest games clutter his office. He's wearing jeans and a game T-shirt rather than a suit, and he can argue at length why Ultima II is the best in the series.

He's spent a lot of time thinking about the game of selling games and the emerging straction genre, picking apart gameplay details and marketing plans.

Uprising 2's Wraith

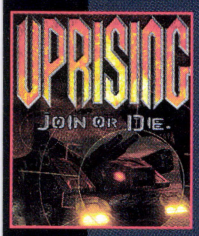
"If you'd asked me before Uprising shipped, I'd have guessed it would sell a million," he says, with just a half-smile.

Instead, Uprising's sold just over 20,000 domestically, according to market-research firm PC Data. While Cyclone officials wouldn't disclose numbers, they hinted that the game did much better than that internationally.

"When marketing it, we were thinking that we have to *explain* the new experience," Margolin says. "We were trying to place it in the middle of action and strategy—that it's new, never seen. The idea of selling it as brand new, while a solid concept, isn't necessary because for gamers as a whole, you don't have to talk in terms of mixing genres."

Round 1 Scorecard

The first generation of straction games met with critical success but didn't resonate with gamers. While replaying them for this story, there were certain things that dazzled us and others that made us want to scream. Shared strengths include novel, unique concepts and immersive, addictive gameplay. Shared flaws are invariably the interface—no one has it right yet—resulting in a rather high learning curve. Oddly, that's not made easier by the difficulty of these games. As Peter Karpas, Battlezone's product manager, puts it, "This is a genre that the guys in the industry created." As such, they've been gamers' games, with no nice "easy, medium, hard" settings or slowly evolving difficulty levels. Here's our quick take on what the first wave did right and wrong. Note that sales data below are domestic figures courtesy of PC Data, which tracks retail and mail-order chains representing more than 70 percent of the US market.



UPRISING

RELEASED: October 1997
SALES: 20,245

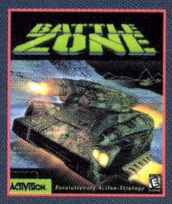
THE GOOD:
- Fun, frantic action immediately
- Great selection of unique weapons
- Ability to immediately call in infantry, tanks, and air or KSAT strikes right where you need them, when you need them

THE BAD:
- Inconsequential story
- No D3D support
- Difficult to tell your units from natives
- No way to control or reclaim units once they're beamed in
- No guidance for what tech to buy when

BATTLEZONE

RELEASED: March 1998
SALES: 51,234

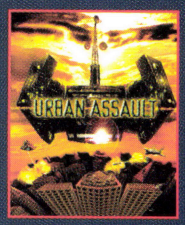
THE GOOD:
- Absolutely incredible graphics
- Cool hovertank physics
- Interesting map
- Nicely developed story



THE BAD:
- Often lacks a frantic, in-your-face action pace in single-play
- Unintelligent unit AI
- Annoying resource models

URBAN ASSAULT

RELEASED: August 1998
SALES: Too early to tell

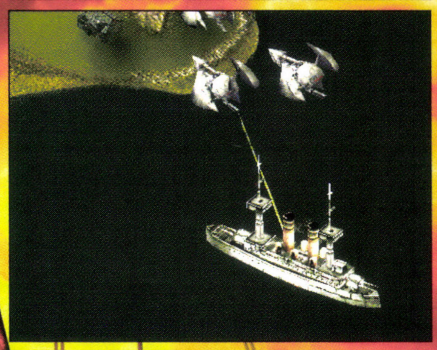


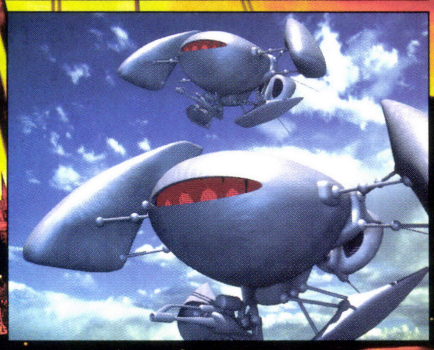
THE GOOD:
- Unique, almost Bauhaus graphics
- Immediate unit creation
- Moody and atmospheric
- Ability to jump into every ground and air unit

THE BAD:
- Lack of mission variety
- Unfriendly user interface

You command turn-of-the-century Tanks.
They command 200-foot Fighting Machines.

Size doesn't matter. Strategy does!





When the Martian war machine lands on the green and pleasant land of 19th century Britain, strategy is all you've got. And in this revolutionary non-linear war, you'll need it. Deploy your forces anywhere on the map of Britain. Choose your missions. Pick your battles. Because you can lose a battle and still win the War. Maybe. Dozens of 3D rendered units stand between you and Martian domination.
[Or experience strategy from the other side and play as the Martians!]

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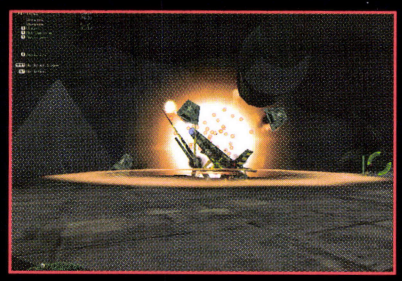
He wonders whether having big pictures of tanks on the Uprising box (and on the Battlezone box) really helps communicate what the game's about.

"Were people expecting a tank shoot-'em-up game? Can people identify with a Wraith tank? Can you get emotional about a Wraith tank? No one has that attachment," he says.



As Battlezone II's release date draws nearer, expect to see the Web inundated with gorgeous screens (like this one from the first game).

"We failed to deliver to consumers the idea of being a commander, a field general on a field with troops, commanding them, taking damage with them. That's crystallized in Uprising 2, giving something you can relate to."

Expect a "new kind of general in a new kind of war" theme for the sequel. The intimidating commander on our cover will be strongly emphasized on the box and in ads.

Activision's Johnson also looks to improve the way they communicate about the game, acknowledging that it can be tricky when you're trying to educate gamers about a new genre and its mechanics. Because Battlezone's graphics were so incredible, they featured huge, compelling, action-packed screenshots. They'll do that again—and release demos and gameplay AVIs.

Microsoft launched an extensive Urban Assault campaign with gorgeous screens and text overlays that clearly are educational. It's impossible to misunderstand what Urban Assault's about after checking out the ads and the box. Given the genre's lack of breakthrough success, the company is "cautiously optimistic" about sales, says Sposato.

Studying Gamers

There are those who question whether the straction genre will ever get beyond a niche of hardcore gamers. The genre's pioneers have to fight the argument that action gamers just want good action and don't care about strategy, while strategy gamers just want good strategy and don't care about first-person control of their units.

Microsoft has looked into just that question extensively.

"We found in studies that the older you are and the more you're into traditional categories of sims or RTSes, the less likely you'll like Urban Assault," Sposato said. "The younger you are, and the more tattoos you have—those are people that love UA. They tend to be younger and liberal, open-minded, and tend not to acknowledge categories. You ask them, 'What did you think of that action/strategy hybrid?' And they're like, 'What? That's just a fun game.'"

Activision reps argue that gamers buy across genres and are just waiting for the right sequel, and Cyclone's Margolin thinks the question is silly.

"I've been in meetings with supposedly important people who say, 'Maybe the genre doesn't exist; maybe you're wasting our money. Strategy fans don't care about action and vice versa,'" says Margolin, whose games are published by 3DO. "That's a crock. Everyone will jump on the bandwagon when the first right game comes out."

Some designers, like Total Annihilation creator Chris Taylor, question whether the genre can go big-time because they believe that switching to a first-person view will never be popular. Your field of vision is so limited, the argument goes, that you lose the overall strategic view essential in a good strategy game.

The interface convention is catching on, though. Crack dot Com is still shopping its straction game Golgotha around, and we're seeing squad-level hybrids like Rainbow Six gaining popularity. Eidos will use the first-person convention in next year's Confirmed Kill: Commander (working title). You'll have a strategic overview, be able to hop into a plane and have complete control on its mission, plus be able to jump into carrier ships to get their point of view.

"It's just going to be a market where people will get even more immersed, as we saw with Dune to C&C to Starcraft," says Kelani Streicher, president of Ronin Games. His Armor Command RTS game incorporated varying 3D views of the action.

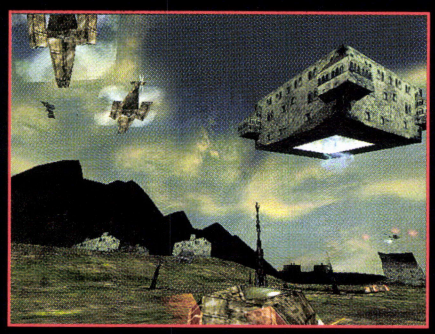
Battlezone's bundling deals mean it has a larger installed base than its sales numbers indicate.

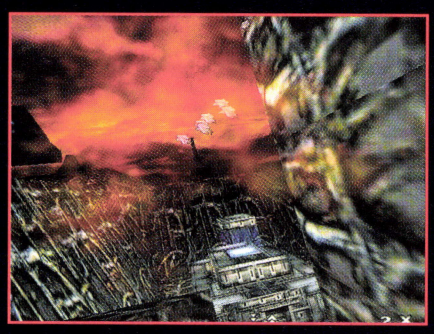
"Right now, people are still used to the old C&C top-down view, but people will want to get closer to the action, to what's happening, get as close to the experience as they can. The action/strategy genre is definitely viable," he says.

A Mainstream Future?

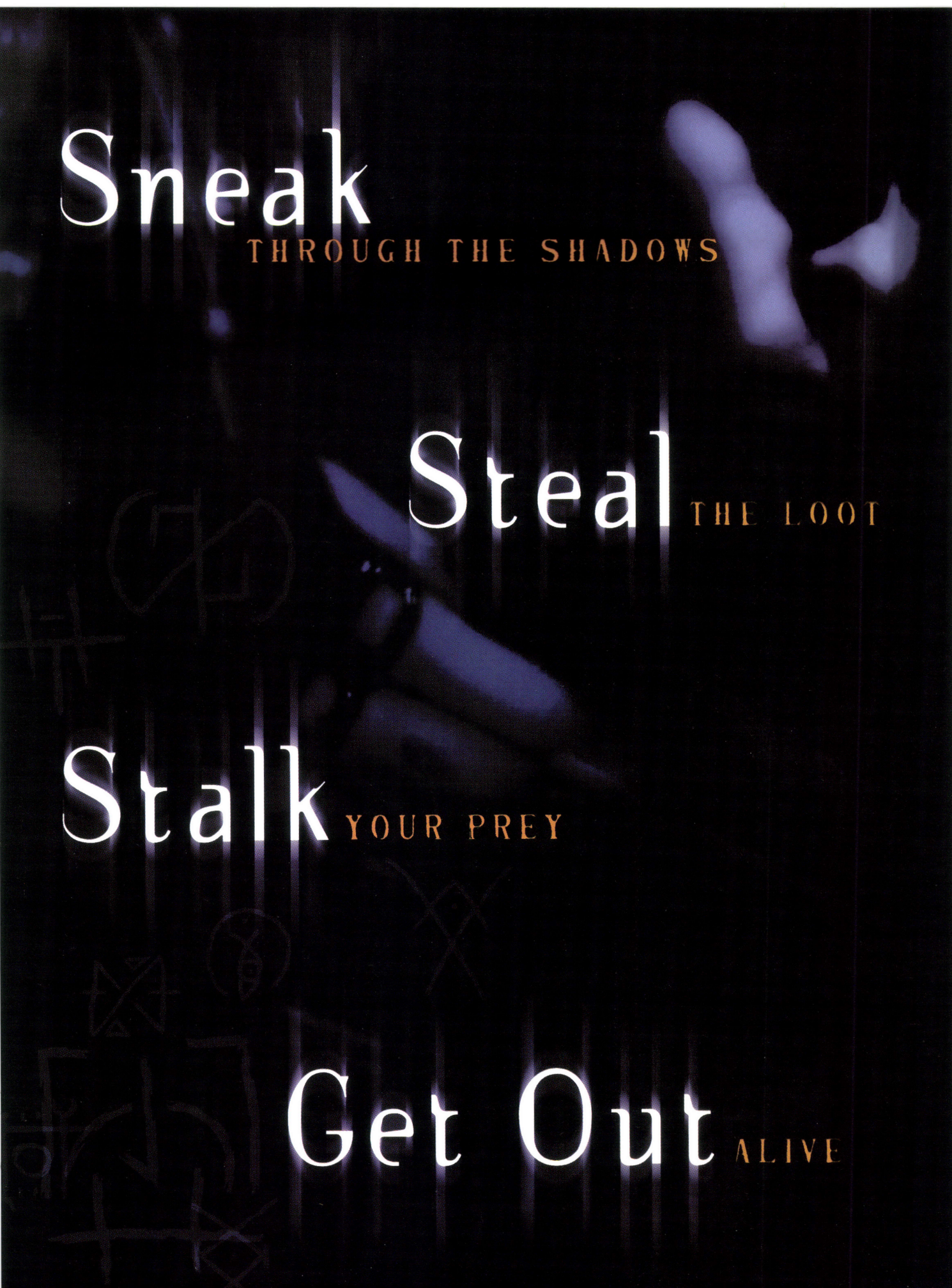
Is the day coming when Battlezone XV sales outpace Deer Hunter XIV sales, when straction is as common a term as real-time strategy? Can this genre be more than viable and break into the mainstream?

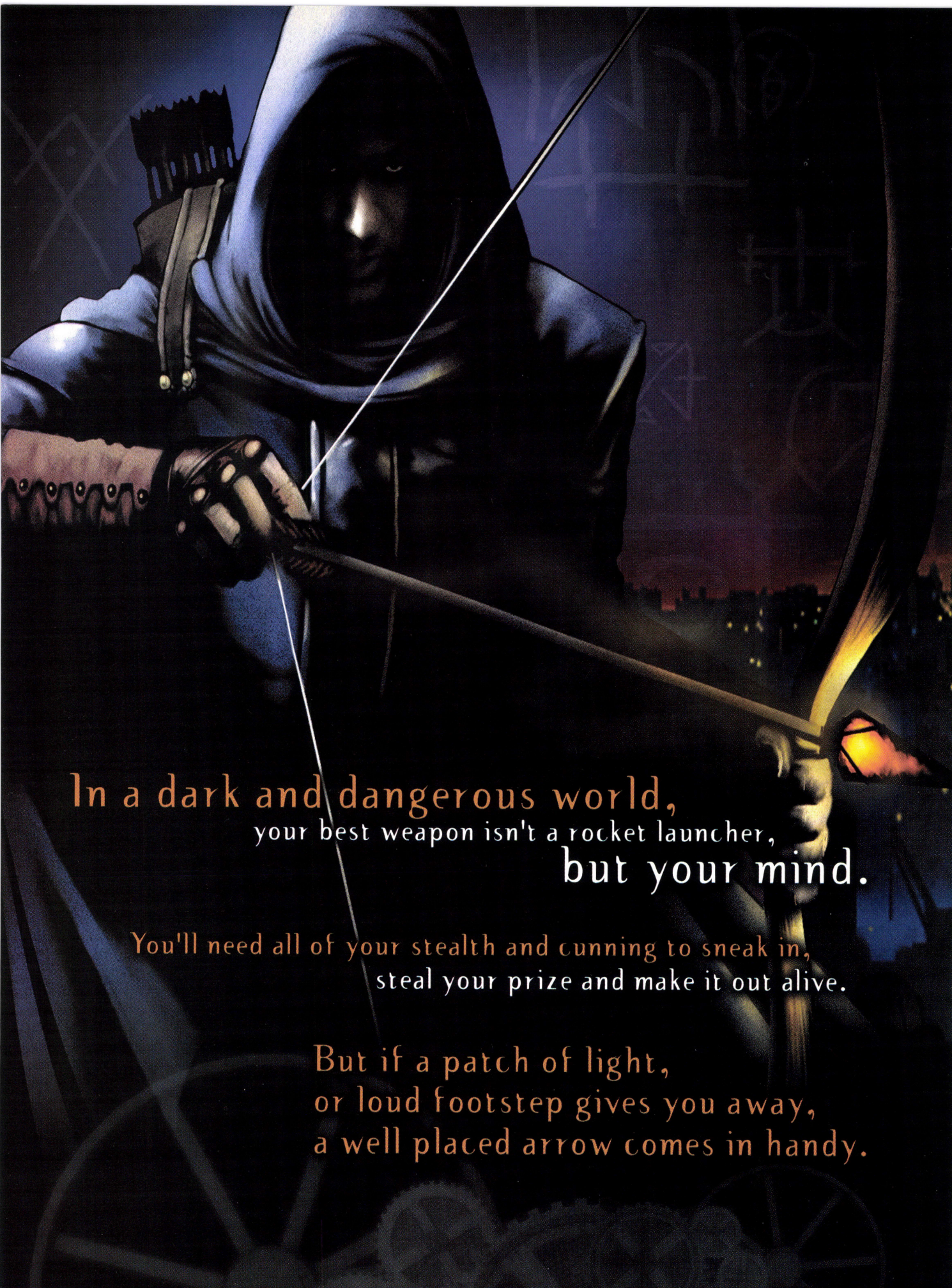
"It's too early to tell," says Activision's Johnson. "We think it can grow. This next cycle—where a lot of us are working kinks out—has a chance in the coming year to break out. When products get into their





Love 'em or hate 'em, Urban Assault's graphics and environments have a style all their own.


Sneak
THROUGH THE SHADOWS
Steal
THE LOOT
Stalk
YOUR PREY
Get Out
ALIVE


In a dark and dangerous world,
your best weapon isn't a rocket launcher,
but your mind.
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steal your prize and make it out alive.
But if a patch of light,
or loud footstep gives you away,
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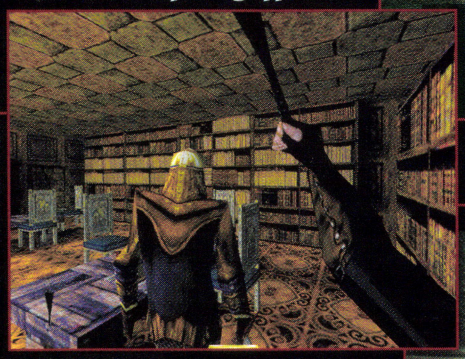

When all else fails, it's time for some swordplay.

Cause some mayhem with your fire arrows.

Use a holy water arrow to keep the undead off your back.

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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second and third iterations, people will jump on, knowing that sequels are better than originals."

Activision will also benefit from the large number of bundling deals—Battlezone was included with several graphics cards. The bundles might not show up in sales numbers, but they help build awareness and a user base, Johnson says.

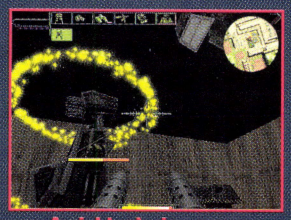
In these heady early days of a new genre, everyone's hoping their game is the one that makes it—but they're rooting for all the others, too. The sniping we usually hear when companies have products in the same category is suspiciously absent. A mutual respect and camaraderie have replaced it as they all take different paths with the same goal: making their game and the genre a success.

The Sequels

UPRISING 2: LEAD AND DESTROY

Anticipated Release: November 1998

Uprising 2 builds upon the Uprising foundation, with even more emphasis on the adrenaline-pumping action side. The overhauled graphics rival those in Forsaken, with gorgeous explosions and other effects in 16-bit color, new skies, and cool new terrain. The story picks up where Uprising left off and promises to be much more integrated and interesting, with cinematics introducing and concluding each mission. Including the 28-mission campaign, there will be 56 total missions (some at night) across six environments: lunar landscapes, grasslands, "tech" worlds, lava worlds, frozen tundra, and the alien planet.

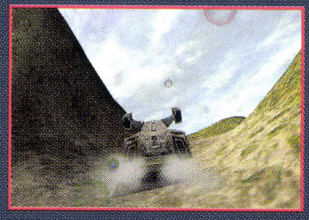


A night mission on an Uprising 2 lunar world.

Interface improvements include the ability to call up a HUD overlay that allows you to select weapons (plus see how much ammo each has left) via the mouse, as well as call in buildings or troops. You'll also be able to access the overhead map screen via a click on the radar, and there's an option to view the overhead map in a topographic form.

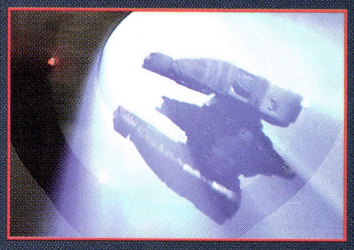
Uprising 2's interface is more intuitive and robust.

On the weapons side, they've eliminated the KSAT (it was considered too deadly, especially in multiplay) and added ballistic missiles, for which there is a defense. In all, there'll be 11 new weapons (plus five or six Easter-egg weapons), including the Tac Nuke, a small nuclear weapon that can level almost an entire enemy base and is capable of terraforming. The Marauder is a half-mortar, half–heat- seeker that at Tech Level 3 can break into five pieces, each of which can track an enemy. The Death Shroud surrounds your Wraith in deadly particles that eliminate every enemy it comes into contact with. Other weapons have been improved: The Mole Mine has a built-in light and is now excellent for building destruction, and infantry can carry Tomahawk missiles.



Eat my dust: there's a new Race mode in Uprising 2.

Other enhancements include new models for natives so you can easily distinguish them, plus the ability to have more defensive towers at your base, sell back any unit at any time, and move units (though not beyond line of sight). There will be recon probes to permanently remove fog of war no matter how big the map, and there's a fogging effect now, rather than terrain and buildings suddenly popping into view.



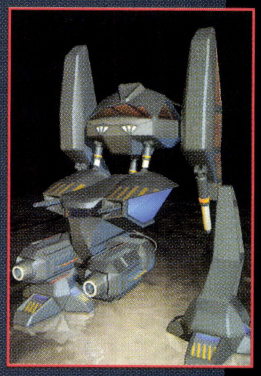
Impressive cinematics should help involve users in Uprising 2's story.

The action-based missions will be much more than just capturing Citadels; they include primary and secondary goals. Your debriefing screen will include all kinds of stats, including items such as miles driven and money spent. This will be especially fun in eight-player multiplay.

BATTLEZONE II

Anticipated Release: Summer 1999

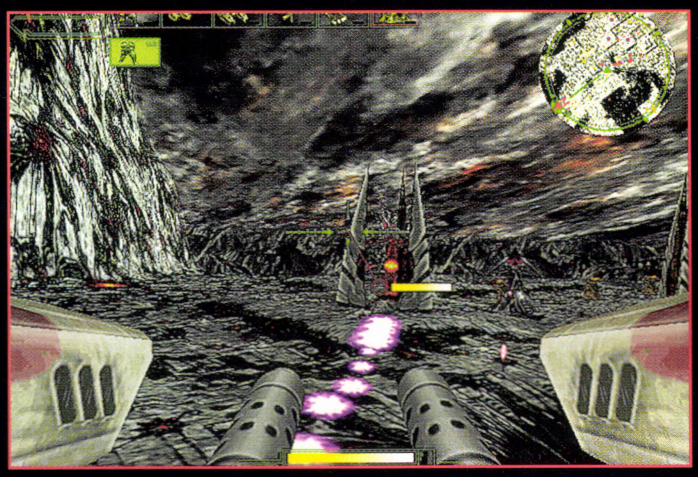
While Battlezone II's overall plot is still being hashed out, we do know that the conflict will have you hopping from planet to planet. The nonlinear structure will let you pick missions on different planets in any order you wish. This adds an interesting strategic element because every new environment will require new vehicle types and strategies.



There will be at least six planets with completely different environments—volcanic, ice, mountainous, desert, a Venus-like planet with a thick, sight-limiting fog, and perhaps more. The missions will vary in scope from just one tank (think assassination) to grand battles involving scores of units.

The interface will be more streamlined to minimize micromanagement, and it will be restructured to focus on squad-level rather than single-unit command. Also look for common-sense AI (such as the smarts to pick up their own health and ammo packs) in undirected units.

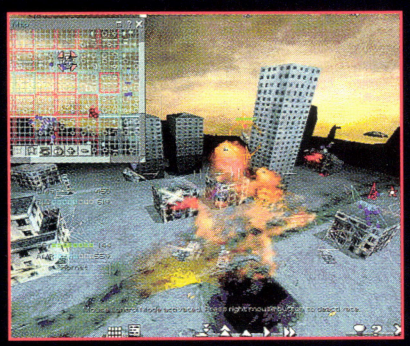
The revamped physics model will give each vehicle type its own unique characteristics. The resource model is also being overhauled, with the primary change being the elimination of pilot limits.



Cyclone hopes Uprising 2's new terrain, weapons, and interface propel it to greatness.

"The first thing people need to do is exhibit bravery in terms of game design and the risks they'll take. I see the beginnings of the genre, and I love these games, Uprising and Battlezone," Sposato says.

Cyclone thinks Uprising 2 is "the perfection of the gaming experience we created in Uprising," Margolin says; and of course it hopes the game will capture gamers' imagination and attention. Even so, the studio is committed to another iteration. Uprising 3 is already in development; and while Cyclone steadfastly refused to discuss it, we gleaned that the game will have an entirely new engine, a present-day setting, and RPG elements included with the straction mix (your infantry would have names and gain experience, for example).



Unlike in Battlezone and Uprising, Urban Assault lets you take control of any unit at any time.

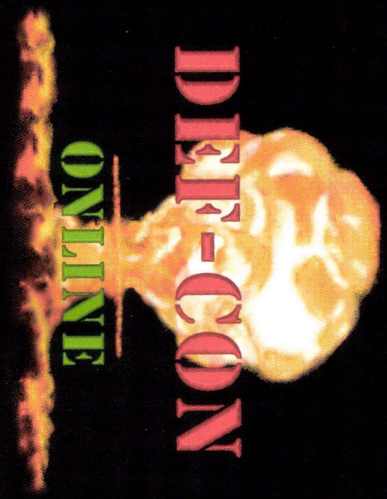
Microsoft believes the genre can be successful, and while only admitting that a deal with developer Terratools for Urban Assault 2 is "likely," the company again brings up the early days of the RTS genre.

"Two things happened: game design made games in the genre easier, and then the majority acclimated to a new level," Sposato says. "Gamers will evolve along with this category."

The next straction wave will be easier and more approachable, thanks to better interface and game design. And by now, gamers are familiar with the enticing mix of action and strategy. This next year—as the cautious industry watches the success (or lack thereof) of Urban Assault, Uprising 2, and Battlezone II—is make-or-break for the genre. *—Daniel Morris contributed to this story*

PLAY THE DEMO ON
PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

We dug into the archives and pulled up the playable demos for every game in this genre, including Uprising, Battlezone (the latest version, which supports Voodoo II), and Urban Assault. Cyclone also provided us with an exclusive Uprising 2 movie so you could get a taste of the enhanced graphics and gameplay.



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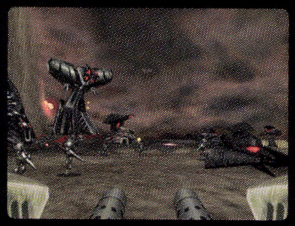
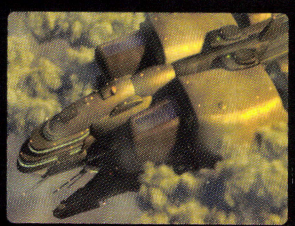
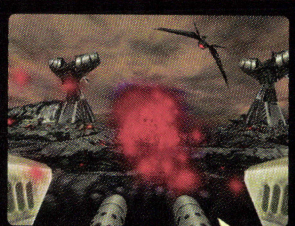
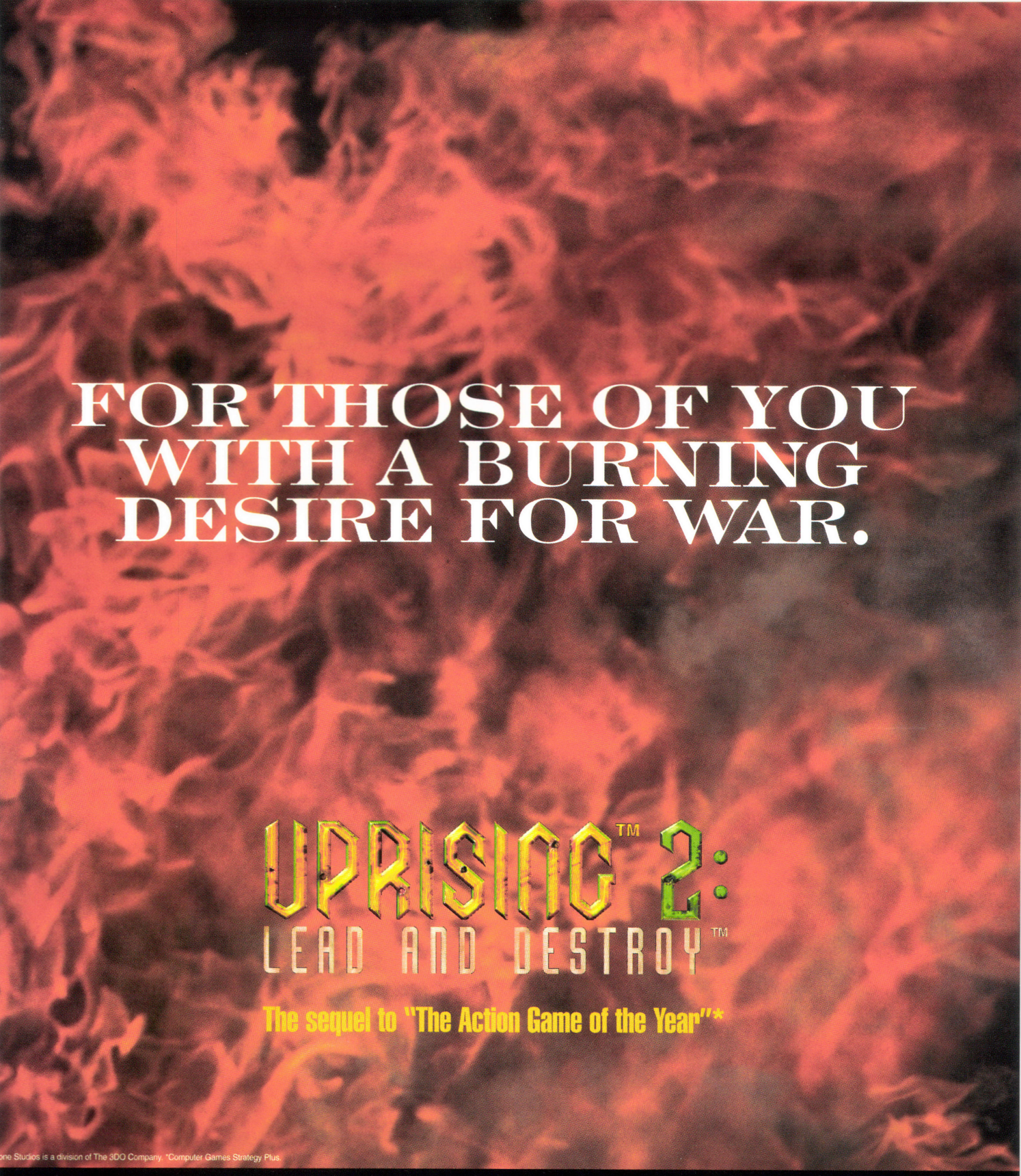


PC
CD-ROM

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

"The game looks beautiful. The 3Dfx graphics that I saw were flat out amazing." - Game Pen



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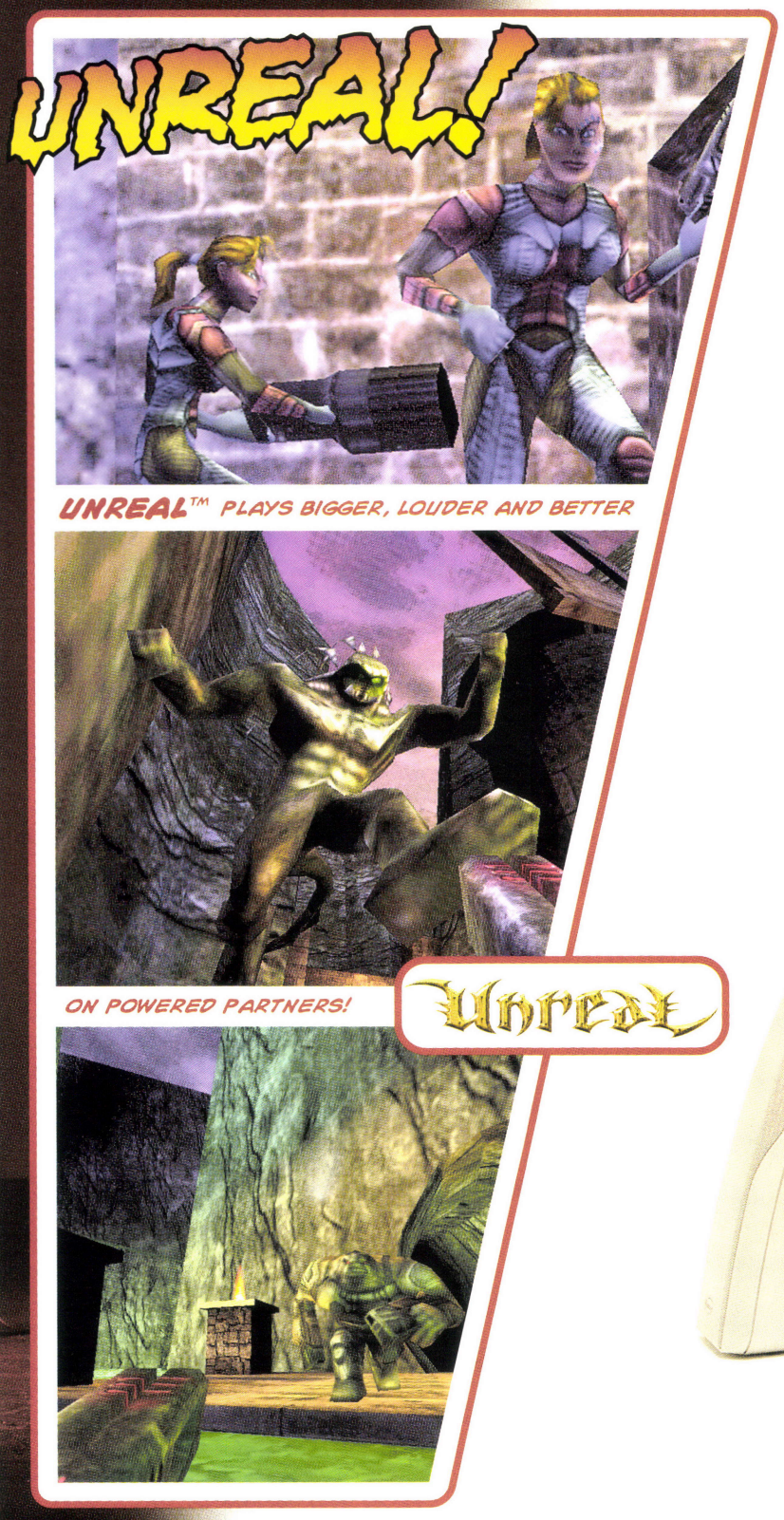

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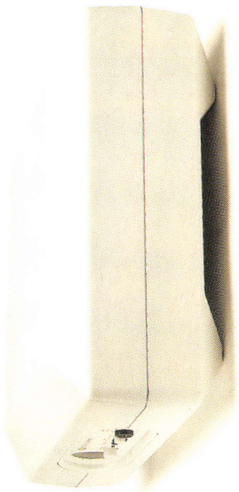

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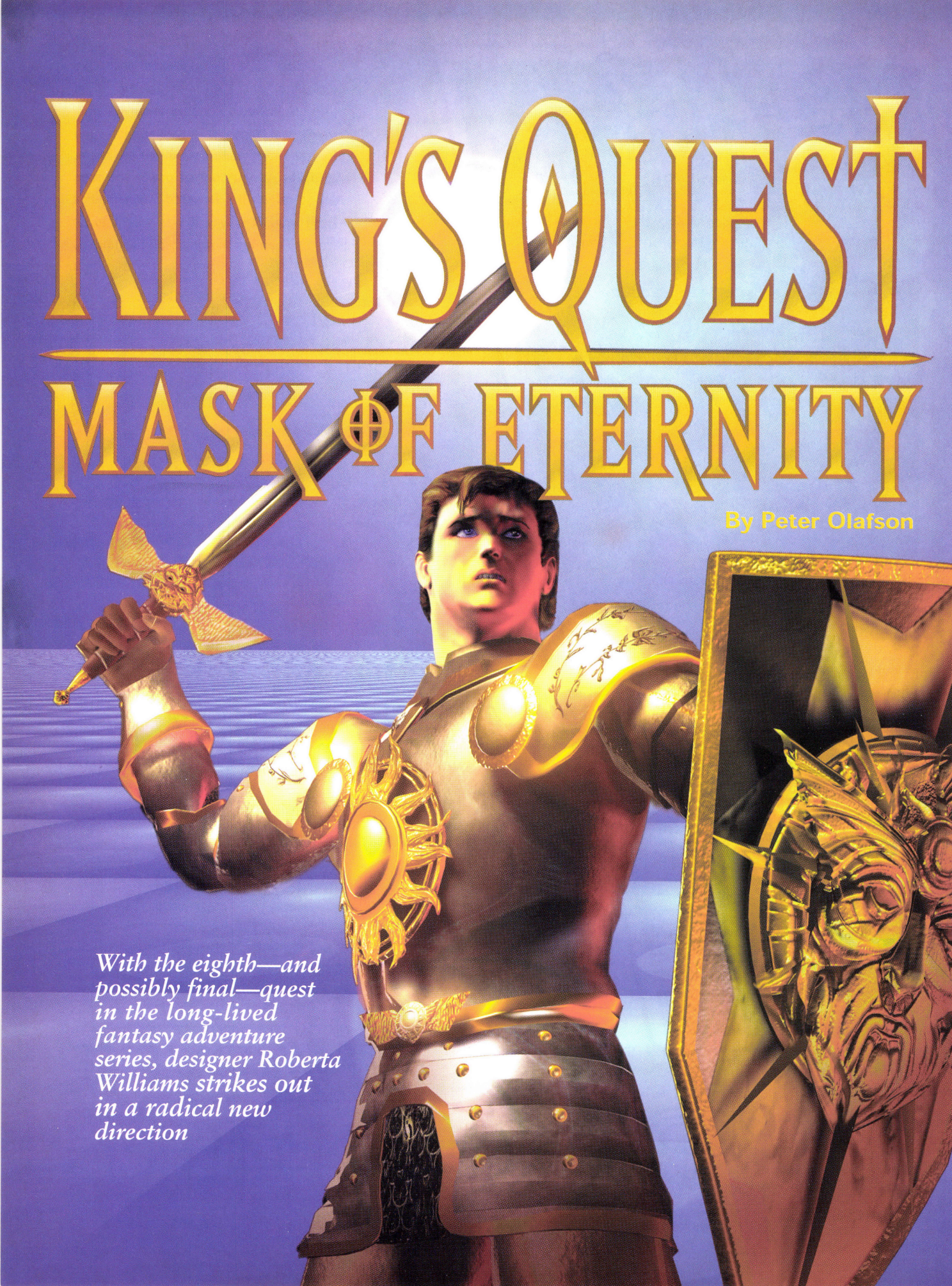
KING'S QUEST

MASK OF ETERNITY

By Peter Olafson



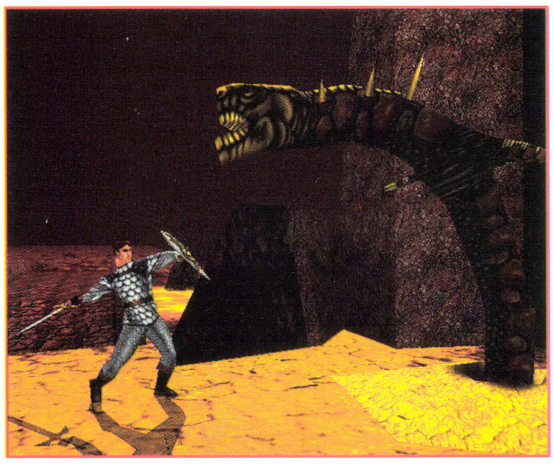
With the eighth—and possibly final—quest in the long-lived fantasy adventure series, designer Roberta Williams strikes out in a radical new direction

King's Quest fans take these games personally. Back in 1986, when King's Quest III featured an apparently less-than-royal personage as its central character, they wrote in to complain that it wasn't a real King's Quest. Two years later, when word got out that King Graham might buy the farm in KQIV, they wrote in to ask that he be spared. And in 1990, when the original King's Quest (which is on this month's disc) was reissued with enhanced graphics and sound, they lamented that it was tantamount to the colorization of black-and-white movies.

It will be interesting indeed to see how these same fans respond to Mask of Eternity—KQ's single most significant change in direction in the series' 14-year history. This eighth KQ game, slated to arrive in stores this month, not only features a commoner in the pivotal role—a solidly built, virtuous, English-accented bloke by the name of Connor—but he's a *3D* commoner. Word has it that Cendant has decided this will be the series' finale, but with Sierra up for sale (see this month's GameWire), that's now up in the air. If it does end up being the last quest, the series is going out with quite a bang.

KQ in 3D

MOE leaves behind the pure-puzzle adventures and 2D realms of KQs I through VII for 3D gameworlds and gameplay that filter adventure through a heady blend of action and light role-playing. While I can't say it's a natural extension of its predecessors—after all, this is a very different sort of game—I can say, based on extended acquaintance with an alpha version (with four of the seven gameworlds up and running), that MOE promises to be richly entertaining.



Haven't seen this baby yet, and I'm not sure I want to...

That owes a lot to atmosphere, and not just the atmosphere of head-banging frustration that accompanies the puzzle bottlenecks in conventional graphic adventures (which MOE addresses with an interesting "hints if ya want 'em" technique). The mood begins to build from the very first screen. MOE starts in a Daventry village whose inhabitants—except for Connor and the top half of an in-the-know wizard—have been turned to stone.

Plotting along

You're the commoner Connor, and you've been passing the day with Sarah, the girl next door, when a golden shard lands at your feet. You pick it up—even though you don't know where it's been—and a furious storm immediately descends. When you open your eyes again, it's dark and quiet.

Too quiet.

Sarah's turned to stone, and that's not just a clever way of saying she wants to see other people. She really is a statue. So's her mom. So's the farmer down the road.

In fact, the whole village is looking a bit stoned, along with the occupants of nearby Castle Daventry.

You've somehow been excluded from this rock concert, and that means you're elected to put things right, via a trip through seven disparate worlds to find the four missing pieces of the Mask of Eternity and put them back together.

In Daventry, you'll have to search your countrymen's homes and businesses for a basic adventurer's kit, take advice from a wizard, and seek out the dimensional vortex that leads to the City of the Dead.

They're the ungrateful kind. Usually King Azriel keeps the local population of skeletons and zombies on a short leash, but the destruction of the Mask has broken his hold, and they'll fight you at every turn as you make for the River Styx.

Across the river lies the Swamp. Ordinarily, it's a nice leafy place, but it's been poisoned by a witch, so you'll have to drive her out while searching for the region's true king.

The Underground Realm of the Gnomes is next. Unfortunately, you first have to contend with the rock demons that have driven them into hiding. You must find the Gnomes in order to trade for their pricey weapons and armor, and you'll have to deal with the mechanical puzzles they've left behind.

Our hero closes with a rock demon. (The mushrooms to the left are the most basic of remedies to restore health.)

The Gnome tunnels lead to the Barrens—a volcanic land where you'll run into fire ants, a bunch of traders called Weirdlings, and, if you don't mind your Ps and Qs, a Basilisk.

Where there's fire, there's usually ice (in adventure games, at any rate). In the Ice World, you'll want to chat up the snow nymphs while keeping an eye peeled for frost demons and icy lakes.

And last but not least, you'll take on the "true evil" (it says here) behind the Mask's destruction in the Temple of the Sun.

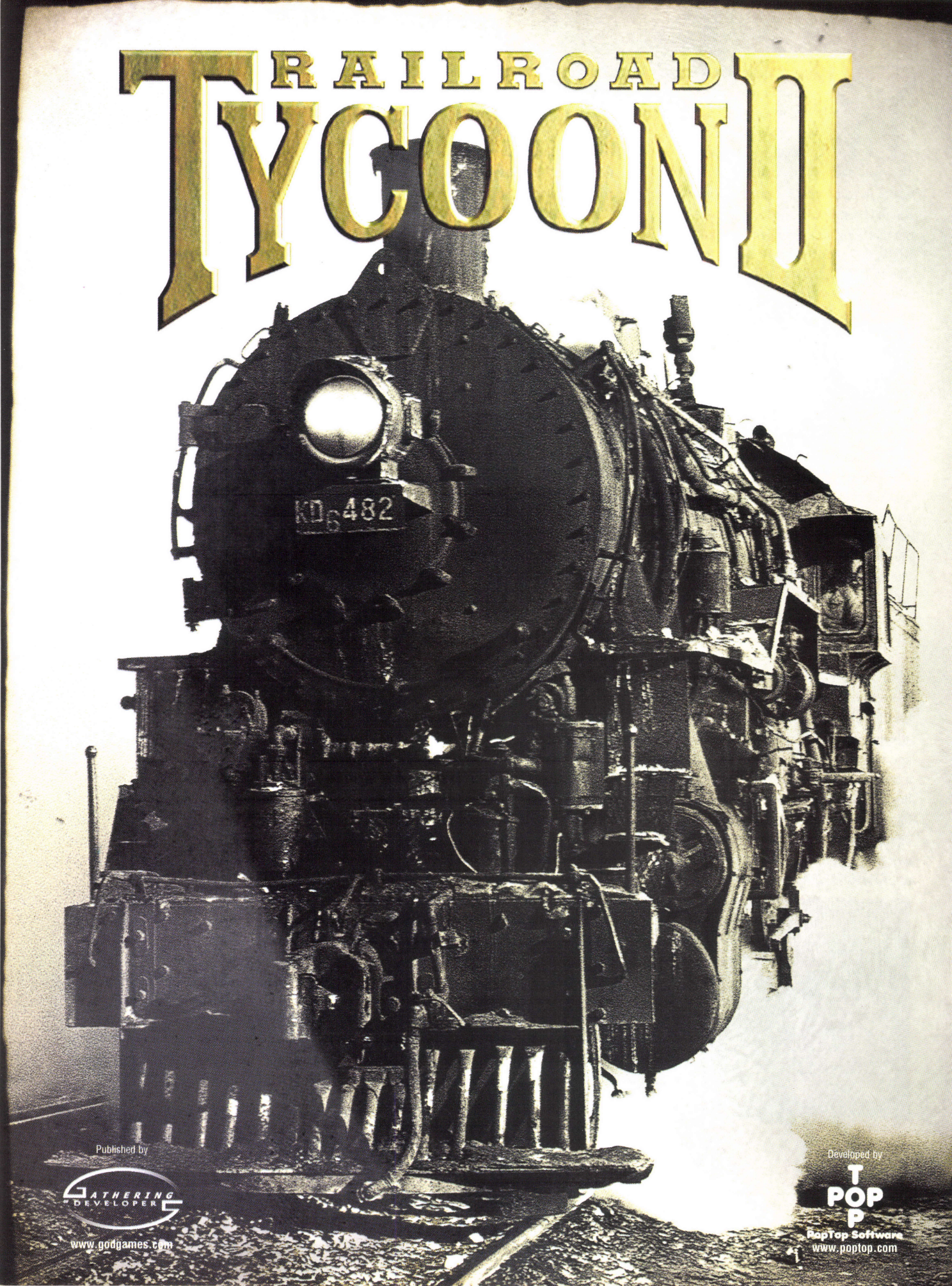
No! It can't be! *Sarah?*

(Just pulling your chain, folks—I wouldn't want to ruin the quest for you; and anyway, I haven't the foggiest who it is.)

And so it begins

Initially, you need to learn the lay of the land, get hold of some basic equipment, and remove imminent threats to your well being. The same storm that turned your town into building sup-

RAILROAD TYCOON II



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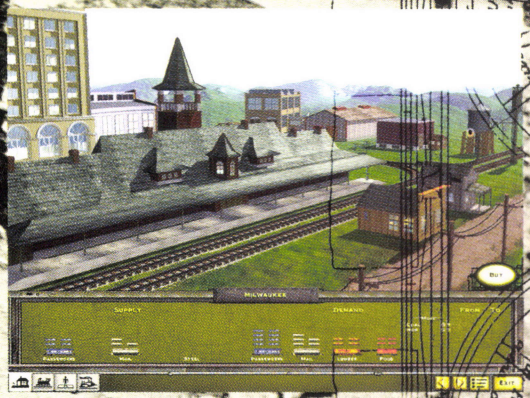

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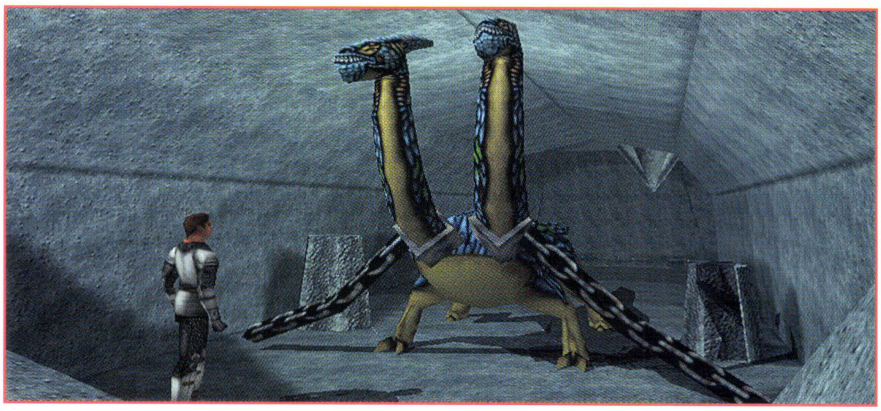
plies seems to have deposited monsters across the landscape—some flopping grotesquely along river and roadsides, and others, more intimidating, guarding key locations. The final one, which guards the passage to the City of the Dead, can't be passed without some magical assistance.

Eventually, that requires a trip to Castle Daventry. At a crossroads, I finally found a signpost pointing the way and pressed north, waiting for the familiar parapet to loom reassuringly out of the darkness.

No parapet. No Castle Daventry. What loomed out of the darkness was a vast boulder, which blocked the pass from cliff to cliff.

Darker than before

Helplessness overtook me. I forgot that this was just a nice piece of computer-game art: I felt utterly over-matched by whatever force had destroyed the Mask. I was reminded, immediately and viscerally, of the *Evil Dead 2* scene in which the party finds the bridge—its only escape route—torn up by some supernatural force. For that one fragile moment, I felt something like despair.



Thank god for that chain.

This won't be the last time I reference a movie that spooked me. MOE is by far the darkest King's Quest ever. (Indeed, it's the only dark one. The earlier games were positively ebullient.)

Sure, MOE has a unicorn on loan from KQIV—an eternal emblem of '70s sweetness and squooshy New Age love. But this one has been robbed of its horn and rendered so monster-like as a result that you may feel moved to hack first and ask questions later.

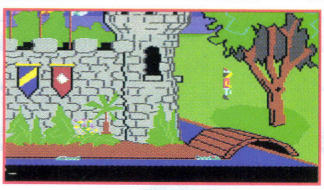
Moreover, the Mask of Eternity itself—the sacred artifact you're committed to mending—is a forbidding, hollow-eyed creation that reminded me of an art-deco version of the mask worn by the adolescent Mordred in John Boorman's *Excalibur*. In short, it gave me the icks every time I looked at it, and that's just right.

Hack and slash?

It's also a pretty violent game—another first for this traditionally family-oriented series. While solving puzzles, following up on side quests, and executing carefully timed

Ye Olde King's Quest History

King's Quest



Released: 1984

Story: Daventry knight Sir Graham embarks on a quest to recover the kingdom's three lost treasures. If he succeeds, he'll win the throne.

Innovations: The first game to do right by the new 16-color EGA card.

Noteworthy: Ordered up by IBM to give gamers something to feed to the PC Jr. The computer sank. The game endured.

Commentary: It's 14 years old, and looks it. But, hey, it's a classic, and I'm not going to rag on a classic. It's on this month's CD, so check it out for yourself.

King's Quest II: Romancing the Throne

Released: 1985

Story: Sir Graham is now King Graham. But he doesn't have a queen. At least, not until he sees a damsel in distress in his magic mirror and finds the three magical keys needed to rescue her. (There's that three thing again.)

Innovations: Err, uhhh...slightly different title!

Noteworthy: Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe, who would later produce the Space Quest series, worked on KQII. And the Batmobile's in there (if you know how to find it).

Commentary: Follows the formula of the first game.

King's Quest III: To Heir is Human

Released: 1986

Story: You're Gwydion—slave to a bad-tempered wizard. Suspecting that the wiz will shortly cook your goose, you escape and search for a way to take him on.

Innovations: A significantly more elaborate and mysterious plot, and an automap.

Noteworthy: Al Lowe, who would later design the Leisure Suit Larry series, was a programmer on KQIII. Gamers complained that the Gwydion-centric KQIII wasn't a true King's Quest. (Bet they recanted when they reached the end.)

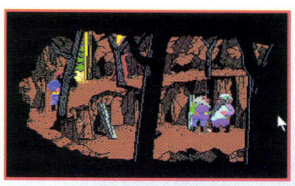
Commentary: A rich and involving adventure, due in large part to the diverse ingredients and effects of the spells you have to assemble.

King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella

Released: 1988

Story: When Graham is felled by a magical (naturally) disease, his daughter Rosella ventures forth in search of the one thing that can save him.

Innovations: A female character in the pivotal role; use of day- and nighttime scenes with the same backdrop; sound-card and mouse support; and higher-res EGA graphics.



Noteworthy: When word got out that Graham might croak in KQIV, fans wrote in to ask that he be spared.

Commentary: OK, I suppose it's sexist, but I never liked having to play a girl.

Yeah, seven on one. That's fair.

jumps, you're also going to have to do a passable imitation of a wood chipper. And you don't simply kill the monsters, but, on the first level at least, you decapitate many of them. You can slit the throat of one critter from behind, and another particularly gruesome death animation has a creature coughing up blood before he succumbs. Just lovely! (You apparently can't kill "nice" NPCs, however. Lucky unicorn.)

To be sure, you can run from some combat situations- -Sierra reports that the serious experience boosts come from solving puzzles and completing side quests. And, by setting the difficulty level to "easy," you can turn the monsters into easily dispatched mice.

Connor's weapons and armor aren't an abstraction. Select them, and he'll use them onscreen.

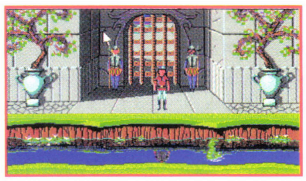
Nevertheless, this is a distinctly mature title. Fans of the earlier, more innocent games may want to park their recollections of peaceable King's Quests past at the door.

The darkness isn't purely figurative, either. The storm that stoned Daventry leaves the kingdom under a pall—a realistic way to restrict visibility—which doesn't lift until you reach the Swamp. Face it: Darkness has more resonance than nice little fairy tales.

The fighting is a simple affair: Click on the appropriate weapon icon (one for hand-to-hand, one for ranged weapons) at the bottom of the screen to wield your weapon of choice, and then repeatedly click on the monster you want to disassemble.

There aren't any tactics beyond keeping a sensible distance. If you win the exchange, you'll be rewarded with a boost to your experience points—represented by a power bar at screen-bottom.

King's Quest 1: Quest for the Crown



Released: 1990

Story: See King's Quest

Innovations: A multimedia update of the original KQ (which also took the edge off the notoriously difficult Rumplestiltskin puzzle).

Noteworthy: Some unhappy fans compared the update to the colorization of classic black-and-white movies.

Commentary: I wasn't among those fans. Computer games aren't movies, and this was a timely maneuver later extended to Sierra's other popular adventure lines.

King's Quest V: Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder

Released: 1990

Story: Another evil wizard steals Graham's castle- -with the king's family in it—and the old adventurer has to come out of retirement to save their hash.

Innovations: Numerous. KQV was the first on CD- -storing the voices of 50 actors and lush 256-color VGA backdrops. It was the first Sierra game to cost more than $1 million. And it was the first KQ without typing, using an icon-based interface instead.

Noteworthy: It's got an interesting Easter egg involving the uses for a broken sled.

Commentary: Without the typing, I felt detached from the game.

King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow

Released: 1992

Story: Prince Alexander, pursuing his true love after glimpsing her troubled face in the magic mirror, is shipwrecked. He must find her before she marries another.

Innovations: A plot less linear—owing to optional and multitrack puzzles—and realistic character animations (based on motion capture).

Noteworthy: Jane Jensen (later of Gabriel Knight fame) co-designed KQVI with Williams.

Commentary: The culmination of everything that had come before, and, for my money, the high watermark of the series...to date.

King's Quest VII: The Princeless Bride

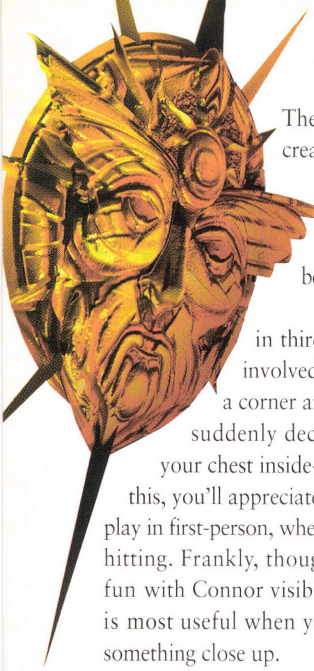
Released: 1994

Story: The Daventry women stage a comeback. Queen Valanice and Rosella are separated by a magical vortex. You'll have to help Rosella save a volcanic realm from a witch and help the queen find her daughter.

Innovations: Sierra does Disney, with supple, Don Bluth–like animations. KQVII also adopts a point-and-click interface, a chapter structure, and a bookmark system for saving games. And it was the first CD-only KQ.

Noteworthy: Alternate subtitles included "What's Lava Got to Do with It" and "Rosella vs. the Volcano."

Commentary: A beautiful game that, in retrospect, was pitched a little bit too young.

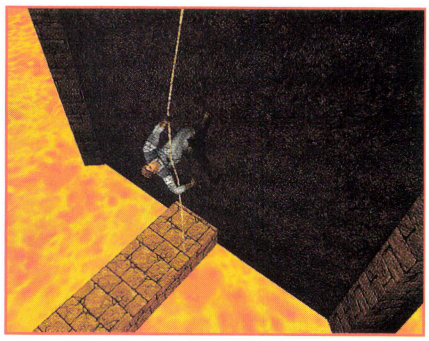


Then you can search the creature's remains for cash, supplies (which wind up in a sort of tool-belt at screen-bottom), and better weapons or armor.

Now, pulling this off in third-person can be a little involved when you run around a corner and a horde of skeletons suddenly decides it wants to turn your chest inside-out. In moments like this, you'll appreciate the fact that you can play in first-person, where you see who you're hitting. Frankly, though, the game's more fun with Connor visibly in it. First-person is most useful when you want to inspect something close up.

Genre-lizations

So is the new King's Quest an action game? Not exactly. Yes, there's a lot of fighting and running (or trudging, as the case may be), but the combat was over pretty quickly at "normal" difficulty level (one of three). Action here is more of a means than an end: It makes your character stronger for bigger and badder nasties to come, and it gives texture to the fabric of puzzles—a bit like the direction Raven was taking in Hexen II.



You control Connor's ascent and descent with the grappling hook.

Consider: One of the most important acquisitions in Daventry is a grappling hook and rope found on the second floor of the village mill. Fortunately, the millstone downstairs can act as a stepping stone for a jumping Connor. Unfortunately, he can't get on the stone without getting clobbered by the rotating grinder, and manual attempts to stop the waterwheel that drives it are rewarded only with a serious dunking. Fortunately, he can stop the water itself. How? Well, there's this tree... Needless to say, it'll take some serious action on your part to bring that grinder to a halt.

Look at it this way, Connor: at least it didn't get in your hair.

And, to be sure, killing isn't the only way to earn experience. Completing side quests counts as well. In the City of the Dead, I was rewarded for freeing a small child who'd been imprisoned by the monsters. She ran home without my escort, and I promised to look in on her later.

And you know, I'm looking forward to it. It's nice to be able to crisscross between worlds, and visiting the child is one of three tasks I've set for myself when I come back to Daventry.

All leaps and no bounds

The first, most enduring pleasure of MOE is simple exploration. This world isn't enclosed in any unreasonable ways. In earlier Sierra adventures, I used to fantasize about walking beyond the walls of the game, finding a way to slip through the impenetrable forest, fly over the impassable mountain, swim the limitless ocean.

Here, I felt no such dissatisfaction. The game world was enough, and I could live within the boundaries it set forth. Mountains are still mountains, but the vertical walls can be scaled (with the aforementioned grappling hook), hills and slopes can be climbed or skidded down, and rivers can be waded. (I'm looking forward to seeing how the Ice World level handles snow.)

The graphics themselves are lovely. The shadow effects, especially, add to the reality of the scenes. I played MOE on a system with an 8MB Voodoo II accelerator card (a 3D card isn't required, but it's highly recommended), and the results were positively luminous—as though walls, vases, and even Connor himself were lit from within. It gave the game a sense of life.

Now, I do like what I've seen, but I don't want to go overboard. It's early yet. I've played through only the first two levels (both of which are huge) and part of the third. The game wasn't nearly finished, much less optimized, and some puzzles weren't working the way they were supposed to.

But even with the crashes, lockups, and glitches typical of alpha versions, I found this work in progress was already sticking in my head—pulling me back to the computer in those spare moments between dinner and the early news and the late news and bed. Not many games do that to me. Sierra and designer Roberta Williams are on to something here.

And just think of the letters they're going to get this time. ■

Connor up to his knees in swamp muck.

A Talk with the Queen of King's Quest

TOE designer Roberta Williams founded Sierra (which then bore the very un-gamey moniker of On-Line Systems) with her husband Ken in 1980. Its first game—designed by Roberta and coded by Ken—wasn't King's Quest but Mystery House, an elemental text-and-graphics adventure for the Apple II.

Back in those days, she was handling tech support from their kitchen.

Since then, Williams has designed or codesigned the first seven King's Quests (which have sold 7 million copies), the seven-CD horror epic Phantasmagoria, both of the Laura Bow games (The Colonel's Bequest and The Dagger of Amon Ra), children's games (including Mixed-Up Mother Goose), and a range of other titles. And Sierra has grown into a large, multidivision publisher (under the Cendant Software umbrella) with hundreds of employees.

Williams was abroad while this story was being prepared, but she was gracious enough to agree to an email interview. Here she holds forth on everything from Mask of Eternity's new point of view to multiplayer adventure gaming.

So...what happened to the "VIII"?

Once you start getting to the eighth in a computer-game series, people might start getting the impression that the series could be getting "old" and "stale." Obviously, I don't believe this to be true—if you're smart about how you design and program each sequel. But it just seemed better to not give it a number this time.

Instead, we decided to concentrate on this new King's Quest as a worthy product in and of itself. By focusing on its newness, its technology, its subtitle, etc., [you can see it] as a totally new game—even though, at its very heart, it's a King's Quest through and through.

You're moving to 3D for Mask of Eternity. Why is that?

I think when you see this game, the reason for going 3D will be obvious. I believe that in order to get the best possible immersion in a game, players need to "feel" the world around them as much as possible—and to have a lot of freedom of movement and interactivity. 3D can accomplish these goals much better than 2D.

Adventure games have never traditionally been 3D because computers weren't powerful enough before to accomplish it. An adventure game needs to have beautiful visuals, and not so long ago, 3D was considered fine for an arcade-style game, but not for adventure games, because the visuals weren't "lush" enough.

But now...they can be! I think that Sierra has accomplished the goal of creating a 3D game with beautiful visuals while combining the immersive feel of 3D games with a story, puzzles, and all of the other things that adventure gamers love.

The graphic adventure is widely held to be in trouble as a genre. You've been there since it started. What's your take?

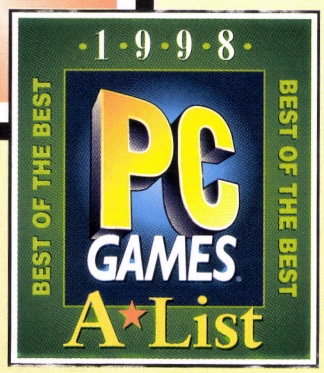
My personal take is that the adventure-game genre is not in trouble—it just needs an evolution. Remember: An adventure game at its very core is an interactive story, and I highly doubt that people will just suddenly decide that they don't want anything to do with stories, interactive or otherwise. I've been in this industry long enough to have seen cycles, and I've seen times when the adventure game has been "hot" and times when it's been "cold." (The same is true for other genres, too.)

In fact, I'm glad that the adventure-game market has been in a down cycle for awhile, because it's much better to release an "evolutionary" game at the bottom of a "down" cycle than at the top of an "up" cycle. That means that other genres are reaching their peak and will begin to go down, whereas the adventure game will suddenly seem "new"—and can only go up!

What's next for you?

First of all, a nice long vacation! After that, it's anyone's guess. Let's see how it goes with this one.

For the rest of this interview, point your Web browser to **www.pcgames.com/williams**.



Making the *PC Games* A-List is the ultimate honor. If it appears here, the game's not just good, it *rocks*. For the complete rundown of every title that's aced its exam, visit www.pcgames.com/A-list.

THIS MONTH

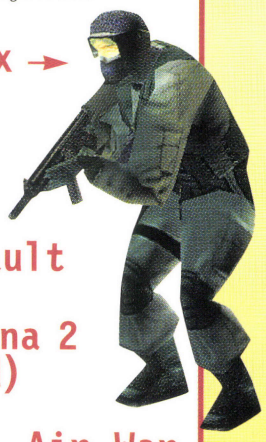
Name	Section	Publisher
Montezuma's Return!	Action	WizardWorks
Ares Rising	Action	Imagine Studios
F-22 Total Air War	Fly & Drive	Ocean
People's General	Strategy	SSI
Longbow Anthology	End Game	Jane's

PREVIOUSLY

Name	Issue Reviewed	Publisher
The Operational Art of War	(October '98)	TalonSoft
Incoming	(October '98)	Xicat
Mortal Kombat 4	(October '98)	Midway
Ultimate Archives Strategy Set	(October '98)	Interplay
Starcraft: Insurrection	(October '98)	Aztech New Media
Incubation: The Wilderness Missions	(October '98)	Electronic Arts
Seven Kingdoms: Ancient Adversaries	(October '98)	Electronic Arts
Unreal	(September '98)	GT Interactive
Descent: Freespace	(September '98)	Interplay
X-COM: Interceptor	(September '98)	MicroProse
Independence War	(September '98)	Infogrames
HardBall 6	(September '98)	Accolade
World Cup 98	(September '98)	Electronic Arts
Warhammer: Dark Omen	(September '98)	Electronic Arts
Addiction Pinball	(September '98)	MicroProse
Strat-O-Matic	(September '98)	Strat-O-Matic Game Co.
Comanche Gold	(September '98)	Novalogic
Dungeon Keeper Gold	(September '98)	Electronic Arts

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Whoa! When life throws you a whole batch of great new games, whaddaya gonna do? Play 'em, of course. Here's what's giving us trigger-finger of late.



1. Rainbow Six
2. Motocross Madness
3. Urban Assault
4. Rocket Arena 2 (Quake mod)
5. F-22 Total Air War

HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue. We review games when and only when the makers say they're ready for review.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. While it's generally the best overall game of the month, a game will occasionally warrant this honor not because it's the highest-rated game in the issue, but because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme, and is weighted more heavily than other ratings in the overall grade.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game? If a game's 3D-accelerated graphics are significantly different than its standard look, we offer separate grades.

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This rating takes into account ease of multiplayer setup.

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sounds and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: All in all, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

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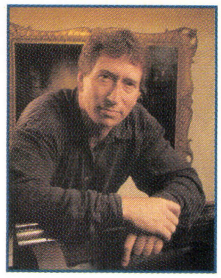
The Lionhead Diaries, Part V



We've been following the ups and downs at Lionhead via director Steve Jackson's chronicle of life at the small development house. In this installment, the team finally finds out what it's been working on.

We have a tradition. Every Friday afternoon, all members of Lionhead have to justify their existence. This involves showing everyone else what you've spent the week doing. If you've done exceptionally well, you receive a polite round of applause. No one has yet earned this honor.

The programmers proudly scroll through screens of unintelligible C++ code. Those with no code have to rely on plain English to make

The group gathers at the game table to prove its worth.

their work sound impressive. Artist Mark Healey's turn is everyone's favorite. He shows off gobsmackingly gorgeous graphics drawn up on 3D Studio Max. "Wow!" "Amazing!" "How the bloody hell d'you do that?"

Mark grins slyly. Most of his 3D pics probably come from disc libraries. None of us would be any the wiser.

This particular afternoon, Lionhead's latest recruit is quaking in his boots. Paul Nettleton is a quiet 21-year-old graduate from the University of East Anglia who we've taken on as a trainee programmer. Originally from Leeds, Paul has a broad Yorkshire accent, and we tease him constantly about it. If you've seen *The Full Monty* or *Brassed Off*, you've heard the accent. Paul doesn't say "Yes," he says "Aye"; he doesn't say "No," he says "Gnaw"; he doesn't say "something smart," he says "summat smaaaht."

Paul's first project has been to write The Birthday Game, a program to calculate days of the week. Type in any date you like, and it should return the correct day of the week. This, I thought at first, was a simple exercise. Just tell the computer to count backward or forward through the days. But of course it's much trickier than that. There are leap years to consider; and an extra day is added on every century provided it's divisible by 400. Paul's had a week to complete the exercise.

It's not so much solving the problem that's important, it's how you tackle it. The calculations can be made in a number of ways, some more efficient than others. But what everyone is looking for is the way a programmer approaches the exercise and presents the final version. This says more about his abilities and creativity than any interview could ever reveal. Some opt for the purely functional approach: Type a date, hit Return, out comes the weekday. Others go to town. Perhaps the screen displays a graphic representing a swirling time-vortex as the program appears to "think" about the problem. The answer appears as a rich multimedia extravaganza of exploding rockets and thunderous applause. It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

But today, Paul will be excused his ordeal. It's a special day. The office is buzzing with excitement. For several weeks, the Lionhead team has been building up the basic tools and libraries—the fundamental building blocks the game will need. So far, no one knows what the game itself is. Peter has promised us that today, all will be revealed.

We shuffle downstairs and take our places round the games table. Peter fixes a baize sheet behind the glass patio-doors to create a makeshift blackboard. Some, like diligent undergraduates, have brought pads and pens to make notes. Mark Webley, who is a registered Coke addict, rushes off to the kitchen to get soft drinks for us all. Handouts are passed round. And the show gets underway.

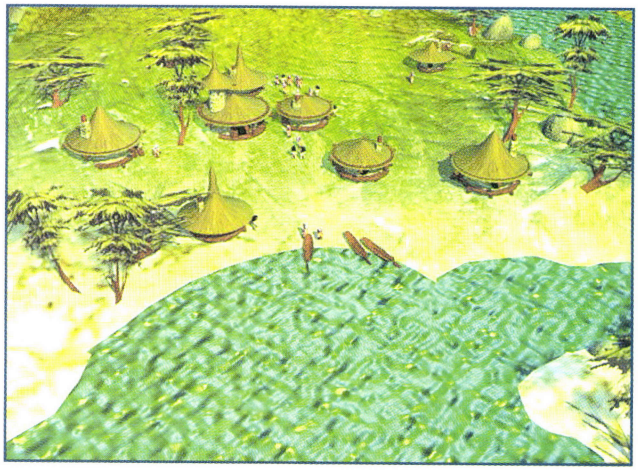
"I know you've all been impatient to know what the game is," Peter starts. "But I wanted to make sure we were all ready for this. Don't forget, we're about to start working on a project that we'll be committing two years of our lives to. If I'd told you weeks ago—before the libraries and tools had been completed—we wouldn't have been starting on the game itself with such enthusiasm. But now we're ready."

There's a pregnant pause. Peter loves to build up the drama.

"The name of the game," he continues, "is Black & White. And it will be the best flippin' PC game anyone's ever seen..."

NEXT MONTH:

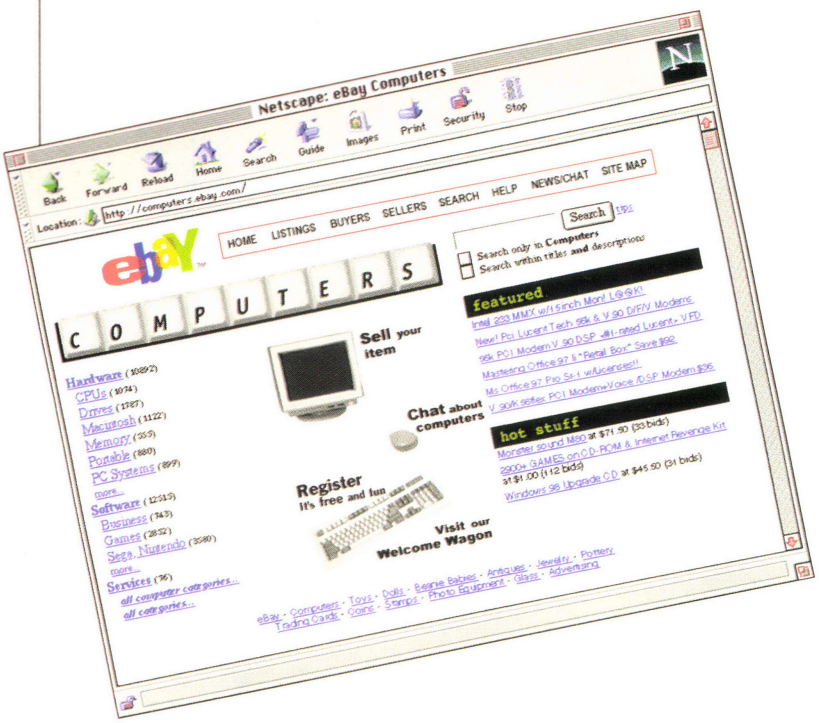
The mayor comes calling.



Even Black & White art like this doesn't draw applause at the Friday sessions.

Have You been to eBay™?

(the amazing new place to buy, sell, and collect)



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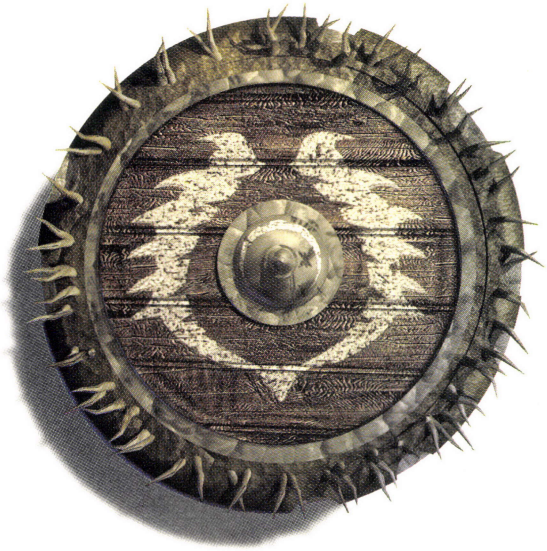

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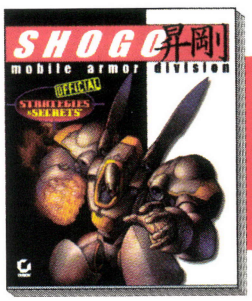

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Civilization: Call to Power

Escaping Sid's shadow

By Daniel Morris

"We've got big shoes to fill," says Cecilia Barajas, director of Activision's Civilization: Call to Power. She's referring, of course, to the fact that those empty shoes belong to Sid Meier, arguably the greatest strategy-game designer in the industry's history.

"This may sound corny," she says, "but we feel we have an obligation to make sure we get this game right."

What's corny about that?

Activision settled its legal squabble over the rights to the Civ franchise and has emerged with Call to Power, an ambitious extension of Meier's Civ universe as projected another thousand years into the future. The game will begin, as is traditional, with the establishment of a single agricultural village in the cradle of human civilization. As usual, you'll have to micromanage that first village into an empire of expanding cities and armies, picking up new sciences, military advancements, and cultural improvements as you go. Ultimately, your society's forms of government will evolve, too, to cope with the shifting cultural and political realities presented by the march of time.

Call to Power takes off in new directions from there. Some new forms of government will make things even more interesting for fans of classic Civ. An ecoterrorist government values ecological integrity above all else and employs terrorist attack units to wreak havoc on polluting enemy civilizations. A corporate government run by Big Business will be able to unleash its lawyers on its foes—and you'll wish you'd been hit with a nuke once the lawyer unit brings your city's production to a halt with a literal flood of legal documents.

A cleric converting an enemy city to his religion. Tithings, everyone!

New stealth units will add a variety of strategies to gameplay. These powerful units can tip the balance of power with well-placed surgical strikes. An ecoterrorist Park Ranger can attack a polluting city and destroy it with a Genesis Device–style attack, reducing the metropolis and all its citizens to a green and pleasant natural preserve. A Neural Ad unit can set up an attack against an enemy city that bombards the populace with subliminal advertising. The people's unconscious desire for products will drive them into mass unhappiness. Religious attacks can turn an enemy city's population into adherents to your society's religion, prompting them to tithe and drain your opponent's coffers. Your opponent will then face the nasty prospect of beating the religion out of his people, a campaign that can backfire very easily.

"We're going to have some controversial stuff in this game," says Barajas. "But it's in keeping with the real questions that have faced civilization. Slavery is a factor in the game, and early on it can be a big boost to your economy, just like it really was. The question will be whether or not players want to use it—a lot of them simply won't. It will make for some interesting decisions."

Slavery, Nazi fascism, religious subjugation, and other sticky subjects from the annals of time will be gameplay factors in Call to Power, and they'll have definite ramifications in multiplay.

Nazi totalitarianism is a nasty but very real threat in human development. Will your civilization produce it?

The game will encourage peaceful, utopian players as well as militaristic ones by including an alternate "peaceful victory condition." If you can develop the scientific chops, it's possible to establish a base in outer space and find a wormhole into another space/time pocket. From it, you can recover alien DNA. If you can figure out how to clone an E.T. from this, first contact is made and your civilization wins the game.

Visually, Call to Power will be in a class beyond the venerable Civilization series. Art director Rick Glenn says: "Civ always worked well with that clean, uncluttered look, and we won't be changing that feel at all. The challenge is to keep that clean look while also bringing the series up to date."

To accomplish this delicate balancing act, Glenn is overseeing the painstaking animation of the 3D art to ensure an organic, flowing feel to all the units. Animated units will move with realistic effect over terrain and fight in animated combat.

Sid Meier's shoes yawn like canyons. But Activision's team is a crew of Civ junkies determined that Call to Power will live up to the name Civilization.

CIV: CALL TO POWER

PUBLISHER:	Activision
WEB:	www.activision.com
AVAILABLE:	Christmas 1998

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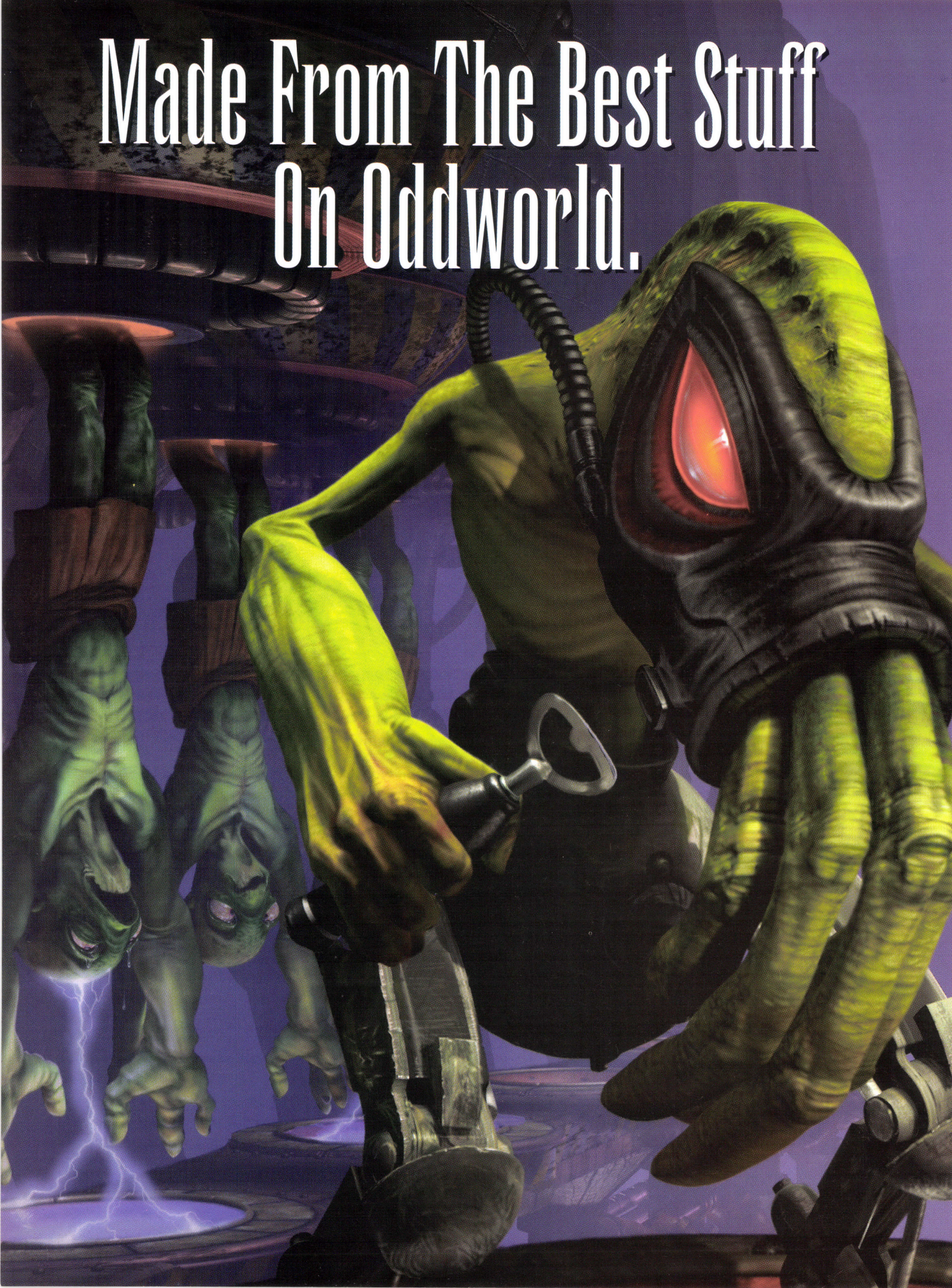
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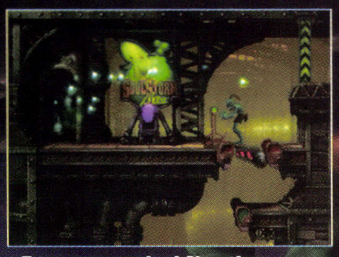

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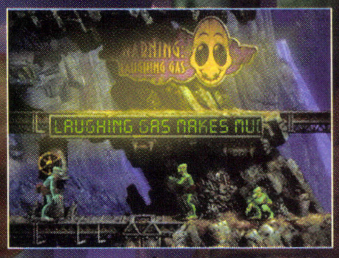

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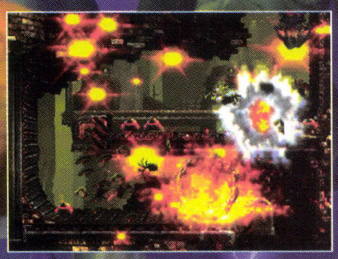

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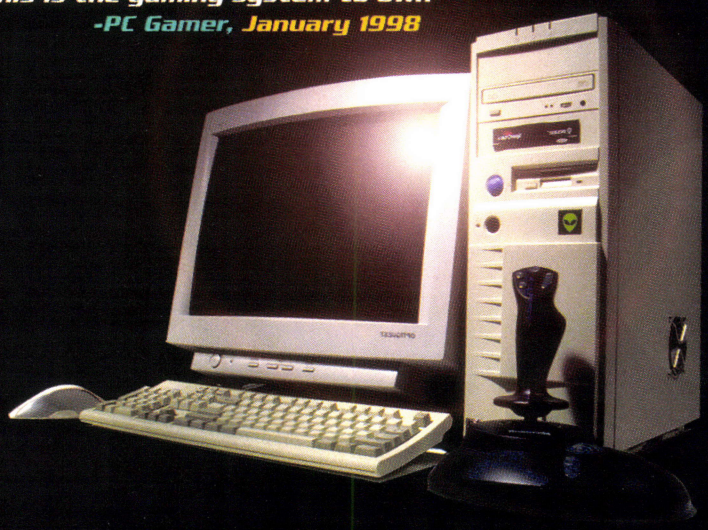

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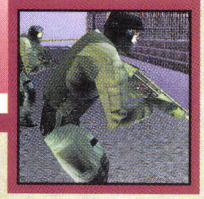


Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six

Planning a head (shot)

By Peter Olafson

This plan for an invasion of a London embassy leaves nothing to chance, with all four teams in action.

Planning is for taxes, college, and retirement. Computer games tend to be of the moment, spontaneous, and impulse-driven. And rarely do the two meet—save in the compelling Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six.

In this second release from Red Storm, you'll spend almost as much time prepping the members of the title's anti-terrorism unit in 2D as you do playing out the 17 missions in first- or third-person 3D.

That extra planning level gives Rainbow Six peculiar resonance—the events within seem the more vital due to the time spent preparing for them. I've experienced that just once before, in a 1994 European RPG called Clue!

In Rainbow Six, you draft your operatives from a pool of 20 specialists. Equip them with a realistic assortment of weapons, uniforms, ammo, and tools, and assign them to as many as four teams. Then use a 2D/3D blueprint to plot a path and set out orders to see each unit through a multilevel 3D environment—an embassy, a Congo mansion, an oil rig, and so on. Pick the team leader you'll control directly (you can flip between team leaders once the mission's underway). Let them go... and keep your fingers crossed.

The action allows you to feel involved with your teams—as in Urban Assault, personal intervention is a plus—and the strategy allows you to feel responsible for them. It's exhilarating to watch your men (and a couple women) climbing ladders, picking locks, and going mano-a-mano with threats to the Democratic way of life. I found myself wincing as I started to recognize the *whump* of Rainbow Six bodies hitting the ground.

On a system with a 3D accelerator card, the environments have a luminous realism that defied my expectations. On a P200 MMX without a 3D card, the game exhibited significant pop-up—especially in outdoor environments.

A lot more could have been done with the AI; as it is, enemies sit there waiting for you to stumble onto them. I'd like to have seen more team formations—they're always running in single file—and a replay mode so you can watch them in action and troubleshoot failed missions.

Go! Go! Go! The lead squad takes off.

The mission maps contain far too much info on terrorist positions for my taste. I can see intelligence giving you a general sense of enemy positions and numbers, but knowing what's where takes the mystery out of the game. I also don't like having to quit out of a mission just to change a key assignment.

Finally, without the planning angle, the multiplayer game doesn't have quite the resonance of the single-player one—it's essentially a nice-looking shooter with five modes: deathmatch, team deathmatch, "stronghold" (defend or infiltrate a base), "double stronghold" (defend and infiltrate a base), and double bluff (capture the other team's hostage and protect yours).

The online experience, via Microsoft's Zone, was richly schizophrenic. Larger contests lagged and sometimes never got underway at all—a problem apparently exacerbated by the innovative (but bandwidth-eating) use of live audio transmissions between players equipped with microphones. (Unhappily, the files you need for this feature have to be added via a patch.)

So there's room for improvement in the planned add-on and sequel. But what's already present in Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six is impressive indeed. Work it into your plans.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX

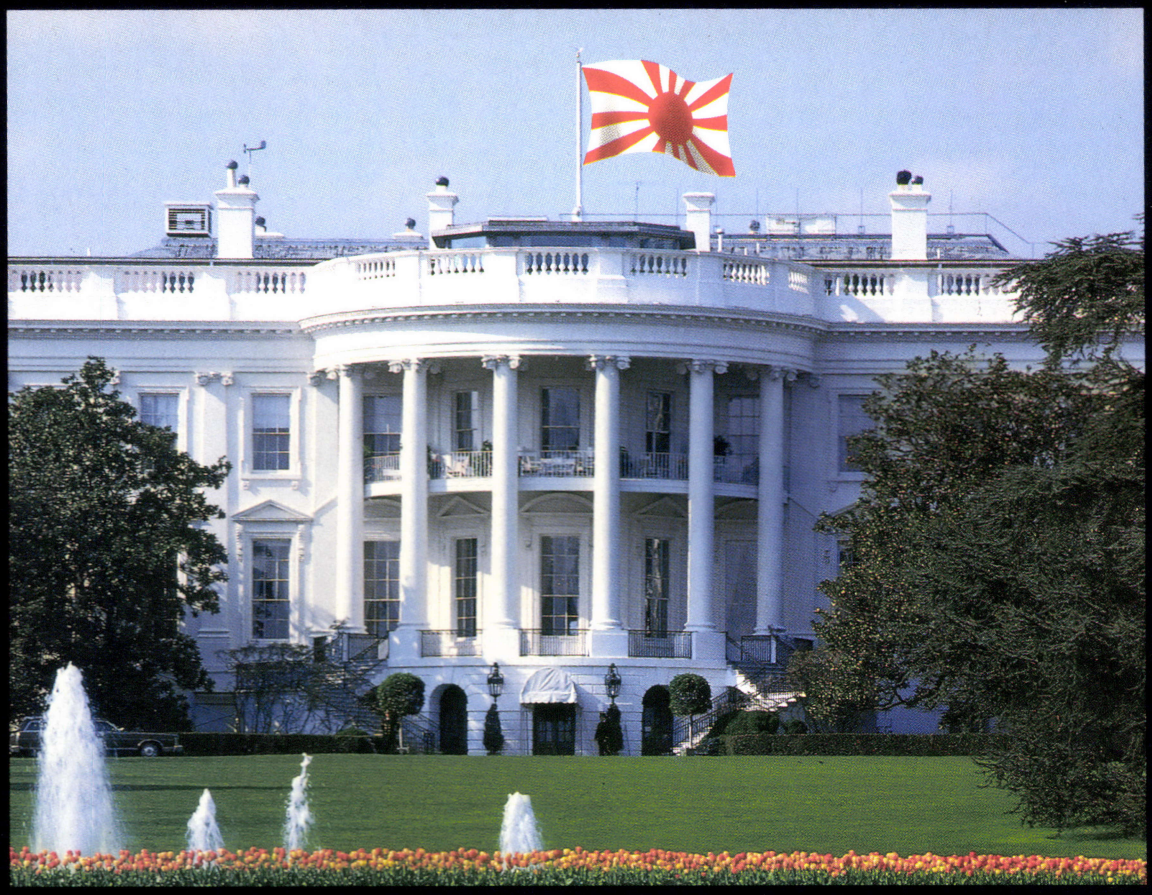
GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

Squad-level immersion: Spec Ops with waypoints.

PUBLISHER:	Red Storm Entertainment 919-460-1776
WEB:	www.redstorm.com
REQUIRES:	P166 MMX, 16MB RAM, 57MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200 MMX, 329MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ Set up as many go-codes as possible during the mission-mapping process; it will restrain your units from wandering into harm's way without recon. ▼ Don't issue the codes to waiting units until you've had a chance to inspect their environs firsthand. This first becomes an issue on the oil-rig level, in which your units are vulnerable to fire from below while on catwalks. Who survives is often determined by who gets a clean shot, so don't give the terrorists one: Angle your doorway approaches so as to create the narrowest keyhole through which to draw fire.



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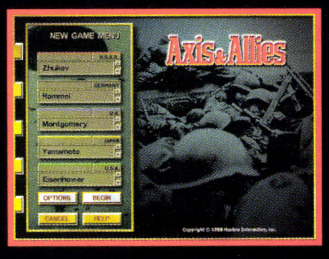

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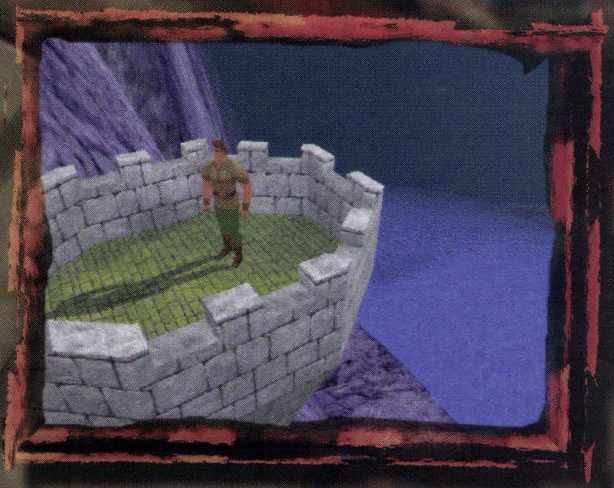

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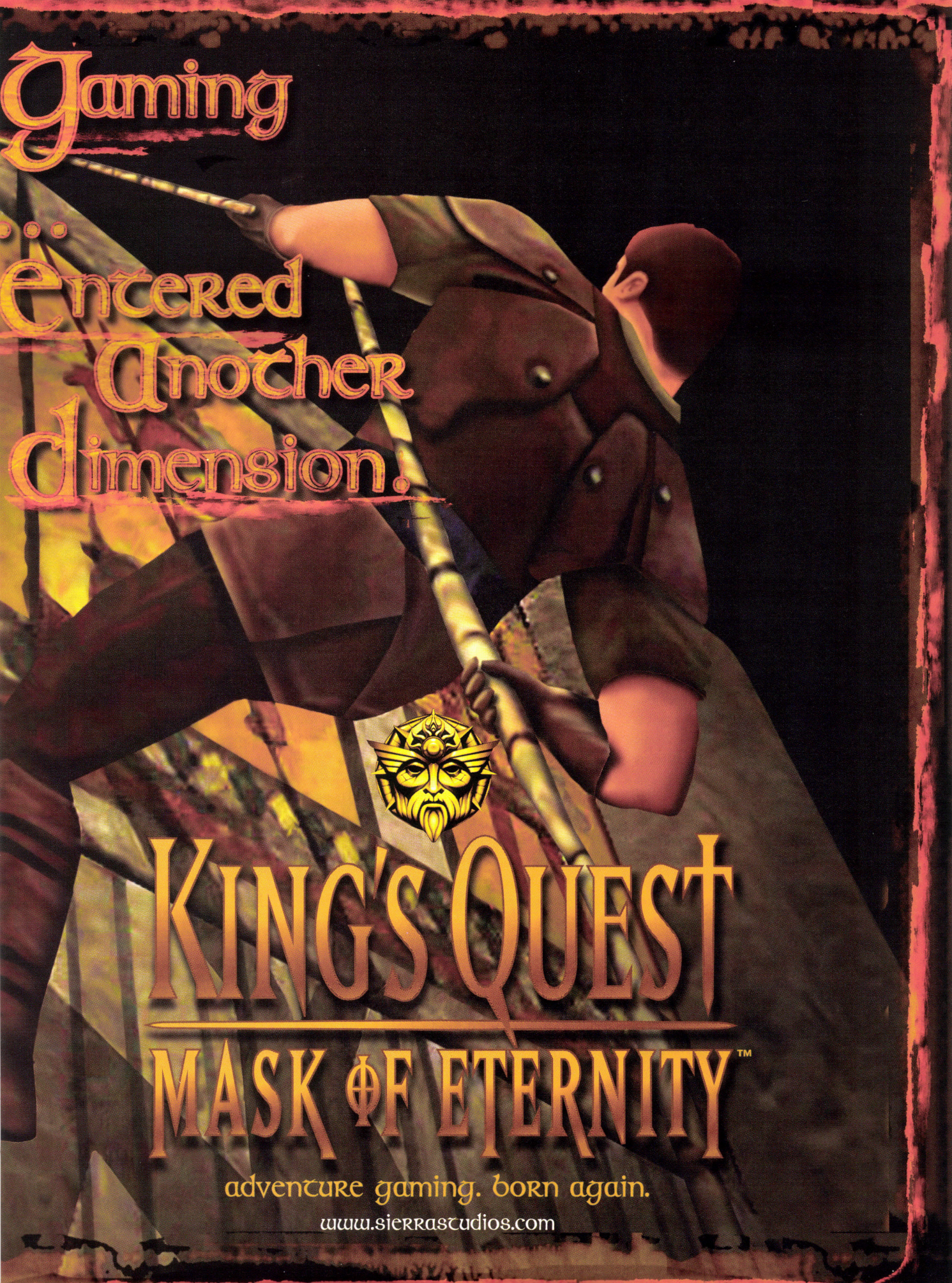
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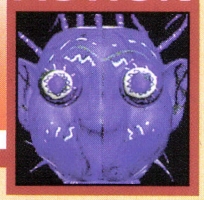


Vangers

More fun than shooting stinkhorns

By Barry Brenesal

Earlier this year, some of my colleagues were launching literary confetti bombs after getting a glimpse of Vangers: "It's a new kind of game, indescribable, revolutionary." Let me state right off that Vangers is a very attractive but hardly remarkable combination of the racing-sim and action/adventure genres—a creative platform game. What sets it apart from the rest isn't originality so much as the thorough implementation of a futuristic storyline bristling with bizarre objects and nomenclature.

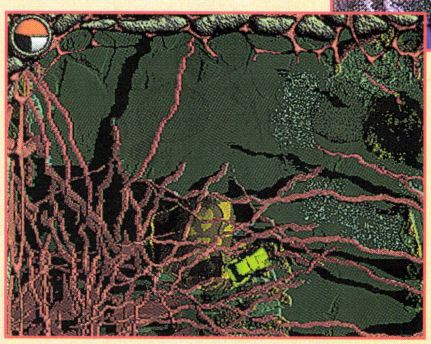
The setting is a series of 10 planets occupied by a humanoid species that's mutated so strangely, it doesn't even resemble Casey Kasem. You play a member of the Vangers, a clan that drives mechos (souped-up, armed jalopies) over weird and perilous landscapes. With time you'll buy better vehicles (37 types in all) and equipment, trade for profit, run more spectacular missions, and, of course, destroy your Vanger rivals.

Vangers achieves its alien feel in part by maintaining a self-referential terminology. The extensive documentation deliberately befuddles: "When on Glorx, the number of pipetkas or kernoboos available for harvesting...are displayed, during the Pip Show or KernoWar, as appropriate." You must master the lingo as you discover new escaves (translation: enclaves) and question their leaders.

These leaders are the mighty counselors, and they offer important missions usually involving the delivery of goods. By running these, winning ritual races, and trading at escaves, you raise your local reputation. This in turn brings a number of rewards, including freebie items that range from weapons to keys that unlock new worlds. You also get credits by completing missions, and you get additional credits if you dominate adversaries in battle or races. Run away, and you'll get few credits.

Please this counselor: he'll raise you from third- to second-class slave.

Over time, you'll locate strange artifacts necessary for completing the game—and they grant you curious powers. My favorite of these is the "Circus" ability, which comes with the Mechanic Messiah. When invoked, Circus draws a huge smiley face on the turf, causing all mechos above it to rise and float, helpless, in the air—except yours, which can fly away.



Vangers' graphics are a visual metaphor for the text, substituting third-person complexity for the verbally unknown. There are multilayered, twisting pathways and lakes, odd, undulating amoeba-like areas, and small creatures scuttling around. You'll discover other new escaves as well as secret hideouts that may conceal treasures. You can tilt, rotate, and zoom the environment, too.

With its 10 worlds to conquer, Vangers could've easily grown tedious. But its developers provided tactile elements and physics to confuse players as they advance. On one planet, the roads are mostly obstructed by huge branches; on another, the ground is so hot that if your mechos can't fly, it'll explode. Learning the environments thus becomes a major gameplay component. Control options are excellent with a gamepad, though the keyboard is quite sufficient.

On the negative side, multiplay reduces the game to a series of races and attacks, without much of the storyline and planet-hopping featured in the standalone game. And Vanger's conclusion is an undeniable letdown. Its several pages of visual narration are wonderfully tongue-in-cheek, but I expected more—at least a series of scores for each world, along with a final rating.

Learning the peculiarities of Vangers' varied, interesting environments is half the battle.

All in all, I enjoyed Vangers greatly. It's a nice change of pace from the standard C&C clone or first-person shooter. Cleverly designed, filled with puzzles, and implemented with painstaking detail, it's a good play.

VANGERS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

Strangely compelling action/racing mix.

DEVELOPER:	Buka Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 195MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS ▼ Return to the first world, Fostral, for easy cash by running over beebs. Empty hideouts may also contain goodies as your luck increases. ▼ Don't blaze quickly to a mission's finish line; explore your worlds. You'll find useful objects, and it'll help raise your dominance factor. ▼ Keep your rubbox once you acquire it. Otherwise, Glorx will re-enslave you every time you pass through the world.

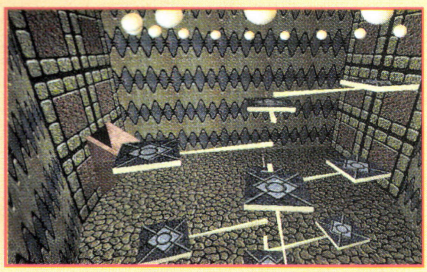
Montezuma's Return!

The gods are smiling

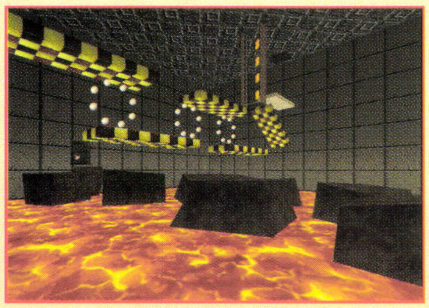
By Jason D'Aprile

In development for four years, Montezuma's Return! is the sequel to Montezuma's Revenge!, the classic 1983 platformer. Raise your hand if you've played that one (no worries if you haven't: it's included free on the disc). By taking a crisp, even beautiful 3D landscape viewed from a first-person perspective and combining it with classic platform-style gameplay, Montezuma's Return! is instantly unique.

Released under GT Interactive's WizardWorks label (the same folks who brought us Deer Hunter), the $20 Return is not your typical budget game. It rivals Quake II and even Unreal for visual panache, its sound effects are impeccably executed, and its music is often phenomenal. Return's 3D engine has physics and effects that are perfect for its gameplay. You'll see rippling bridges, trampoline surfaces, crushing blocks, powerful wind-gusts, cool rope-climbing and swinging, excellent colored lighting, detailed and realistic textures, pendulums, translucent blue water, even stun effects when you fall too far. The game uses different textures, sounds, and music for not just each of its nine levels, but often also for each individual room, making every new location seem truly fresh.



Rotating, disorienting...not unlike the mobile I used to have in my crib.



To get the goods, brave the lava.

A swing and a miss. Make those punches count, tough guy.

You play Max Montezuma—treasure-hunter and descendant of legendary Aztec king Montezuma—who has come to the land of his ancestors to find untold riches within his forefather's old hunting grounds. Traps are laid everywhere, mysterious creatures abound, and obstacles are placed at every corner to make sure no one gets through alive. There are humorous death scenes and cut-scenes throughout, though the game itself is hardly concerned with storyline.

Everything about Return is bent on diversity, fun, and challenge. There are no guns: you can only punch or kick the smoothly animated, sharp-looking enemies, which include Aztec warriors, witch doctors, mad monkeys, rats, jaguars, and, of course, the large boss monsters. But combat isn't the focus. This is a game that revels in giving you a new challenge around every corner, and its variety of platform-style jumping and dexterity puzzles is virtually unmatched in the realm of first-person action games.

There are, of course, a few notable weak points. Mouse control's one of them: it felt too loose, and the mouse "speed" adjustment did little to compensate. Also, combat can be very annoying at times—you can't always attack when you need to (there's an energy bar associated with hitting). And, even worse, you can usually attack only when looking forward; looking at steeper angles stifles Max's ability to even punch. Swimming could've been more user-friendly, too, as Max has an unfortunate propensity for drowning. The game can be stunningly hard in spots, especially since you can't save during a level. Finally, it only supports 3Dfx accelerator cards out of the box. However, it has a wide variety of software-resolution choices, and there should be a Direct3D patch available for download by the time you read this.

These flaws aside, Montezuma's Return! is one of the most entertainingly distinctive single-player games in a long while, especially for fans of run-and-jump gameplay. Great looks, awesome sound, incredible diversity—it's an instant classic.

MONTEZUMA'S RETURN!

GAMEPLAY: A
GETTING STARTED: A
GRAPHICS: A
MULTIPLAYER: N/A
SOUND CHECK: A+

OVERALL: A

Beautiful first-person fun without the blood and gore.

DEVELOPER: Utopia Technologies
PUBLISHER: GT Interactive/WizardWorks 800-610-4847
WEB: www.utopiatech.com
REQUIRES: P133, 16MB RAM (24MB for 3Dfx version), 24MB HD
RECOMMENDED: P166, 32MB RAM, Voodoo II card
STREET PRICE: $20

TIPS ▼ Try to lure bad guys into a corner to pummel them, or else lunge in and back out quickly before they can strike. ▼ Some bosses you just beat down, while others work on a pattern or are a puzzle: Use the Lava Boss' weapon against him. ▼ When jumping high, it almost always pays to be looking down to see where you're going. Sometimes a lot more than just the fall is waiting to kill you.

Control covert operations

Allocate technology resources

Engage in 3-D tactical combat

Oversee empire growth and progress

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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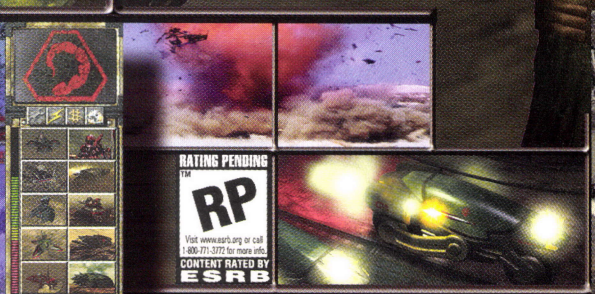

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Redline Racer

A road, two wheels, and 3D glory

By Daniel Morris

Now that game publishers are releasing titles requiring 3D acceleration, it seems like it's time to stop grousing about the hardware demands and just sit back to appreciate the results. If you don't own a 3D card, Redline Racer will make a nice coaster. If you've got a card, it's a whole different story.

D'oh! Fast motorcycle + wipeout = street pizza.

European developer Criterion Studios knows how to deliver a great 3D look. The RenderWare engine let the designers craft six beautiful environments, and there's never an uninteresting frame in RR's 10 tracks. The English countryside by sunset, sandy beach tracks in twilight, desert canyons at high blinding noon, snowy mountain passes with limited visibility—they all offer unique racing challenges that add a lot of variety to the game.

The essentials are basic, as befits a pure arcade game. Riders have their choice of male or female onscreen stand-ins, time trial or arcade mode, and eight motorcycles (most of which aren't immediately available, but have to be accessed by winning circuit races). Each bike is truly different, not only in general characteristics like speed and acceleration, but even at the physics level.

Each bike has its own physics model, and they do feel different. Some are nimble, some are kludgier but faster on straightaways, and some will let you almost hug the ground on sharp turns. They're unique enough to warrant trying each one, which keeps RR not only replayable in single-player mode but also a challenge in multiplayer bike selection.

Gamers will quickly find themselves warming to a certain style of racing as embodied by the different bikes. Aggressive racers will embrace the sleek, full-throttle bullet bikes that can be a lethal pain to handle in the tight stretches. More conscientious racers might fancy the heavier, slower bikes that can easily navigate the turns with slight braking maneuvers.

The good news is that with each bike accessed, you have a full view of the machine's size, gear ratio, braking speed, turning angle, and more. As you gain racing experience, you'll come to analyze your driving style and apply increasingly better-suited bikes.

The actual racing isn't exactly mind-bending and doesn't offer anything more challenging than a basic Need for Speed experience. But there's an awful lot going on. The bike and rider are made up of around 2,000 polygons, and with all of the highest graphics and texture settings on, the view can be enthralling, especially with inspired obstacles like blizzards, sun-glare, and darkness. The clever physics-based reactions determine other dangers, such as slipping and wiping out on ice, or having your front wheel forced up, tossing you into a nasty wheelie.

The sun is an actual opponent in the desert track, as lens flare puts you through blind turns.

While not quite the end-all multiplayer racing game, RR makes an amusing contest for up to eight (LAN, TCP/IP). Criterion and Ubi Soft are also committed to supporting the game, building a Redline community via a matching service and downloadable editing software, teams, and bikes. The matching service and upgrades are easily accessible from within the game or at **www.ubisoft.com**.

For an entertaining PC arcade racer, Redline Racer stands up nicely, especially with its force feedback, Direct Sound, and Aureal 3D sound support. Its shelf life may be limited, but people hungering for a good PC motorcycle title should be very pleased to rev this one up.

REDLINE RACER

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-

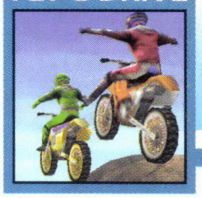
B OVERALL

Fun arcade motorcycle racing for those with the right hardware.

DEVELOPER:	Criterion
PUBLISHER:	Ubi Soft 800-824-7638
WEB:	www.ubisoft.com
REQUIRES:	P133 with 3Dfx (P166 without), 16MB RAM, 147MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Your boost is an important asset. Save it for three specific times: to get an early jump at the start of the race; on straightaways; and after a wipeout restart, to get back in the race. ▼ Your boost accumulates at each checkpoint, so if you've been saving it up, that's when you know you're reloaded. ▼ Sea Fall Bay seems like an idyllic country ride, but those divots in the road can throw you for a nasty fall.



Motocross Madness

Whoop-de-doos and Big Air

By Andy Mahood

With a moniker like Motocross Madness, it's a fair bet that Microsoft wasn't looking to create an authentic motorcycle sim with its PC dirt racer. Apart from the fact that hard-core sim fans like myself are impossible to fully satisfy anyway, the Gates-man didn't acquire his enormous wealth by catering to niche markets and vocal minorities who demand the nth degree of realism in their sims.

Stadium Supercross racing is intense and crowded.

What Motocross Madness delivers is an engaging and entertaining blast of two-wheel mayhem. Developer Rainbow Studios' physics modeling creates a gravity-challenged world where riders spend more time in the air than on the ground. This places a premium on your ability to launch every jump perfectly so you don't wind up leaving the road altogether and entering some kind of geosynchronous orbit over the track.

Particularly noteworthy is that two distinct physics models—one for the bike and another for the rider—have been dovetailed together to enhance the feel and control of this unique sport of dirt-bike "flying." Once airborne, you can lean your rider in any direction with the controller to affect the bike's center of gravity and, ultimately, its yaw and pitch through the air—or, conversely, its traction and wheelie potential when on terra firma. (No special equipment is needed here: any quality gamepad or joystick works, though this game is the poster child for Microsoft's new FreeStyle Pro controller.) The bike physics may have been loosened up in the name of entertainment, but the cause-and-effect of the rider's body motion does feel realistic and intuitive.

Motocross Madness offers a healthy variety of racing disciplines in practice, single-race, tournament, and full-season modes. As befits the title, several standard-length outdoor tracks do a reasonable job of emulating real-life Motocross competition (although there are no real-world AMA circuits, riders, or bikes). There's also a full set of Stadium Supercross circuits and five massive cross-country venues intended to give the look and feel of a Baja desert endurance event. If beating the other guy to the line isn't your bag, play the seven Stunt Quarry tracks and execute "Look Ma, no hands!" aerial stunts within a given time-frame for points.

Multiplayer support for up to eight is offered via modem, network, and Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone (**www.zone.com**). Not stopping there, the game also ships with a nifty Track Editor that allows you to design and construct your own indoor stadium circuits.

Don't expect sympathy from the AI when you spill.

A 3D accelerator card is required, and as a result, the game's graphics—with beautiful light-sourcing, shadowing, transparency, and particle effects—are quite excellent (particularly on a 3Dfx-based board). However, apart from the indoor tracks, there's not much actual scenery. Dirt has rarely been this attractively rendered, but in the end, it's still just dirt. The odd tree or structure would've been a nice addition to the game's conspicuously sparse background. Ditto with the game's audio. The raspy snarl of a 250cc dirt bike has been sampled and looped nicely, but some commentary or crowd noise would be quite welcome.

The Baja mode is a wide-open, cross-country chase.

While some may take the game to task for its preoccupation with impossibly high aerials, simplistic bike-tuning options, and unfulfilled graphic potential, it's still easily the best dirt-bike racer on the market. And if you pretend you're on the moon, it even offers some pretty realistic physics.

MOTOCROSS MADNESS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+
OVERALL

In the Monster Truck Madness school of fun first, realism second.

DEVELOPER:	Rainbow Studios
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com/games/
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 30MB HD (37MB for Track Editor), 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200 MMX, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS ▼ When competing in the cross-country Baja events, stick to flat ground and ridge lines whenever possible, even if this means detouring slightly from the straight-line path between gates. Keeping your air-time over jumps to a minimum will increase your average speed. ▼ Ctrl-G turns on the Gas Gyro feature, which takes advantage of the gyroscopic effect of your spinning rear wheel while your're airborne. Once activated, you can gas the throttle while in midair to drop the rear wheels or apply the brake to drop the front end. ▼ Check out the FreeStyle Pro controller package, which, for $75, includes a copy of Motocross Madness.

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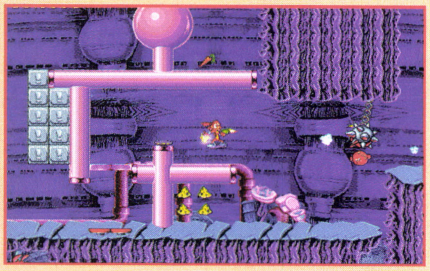
ACTION

Jazz Jackrabbit 2

Psycho-freakout wabbit wace

Three years after the Jazz Jackrabbit shareware stormed the PC action scene, g.o.d. has spoken—and for classic 2D sidescroller fans, the words are gospel.



Random pick-ups like this floating skateboard add welcome variety.

Gathering of Developers' first release, Jazz 2, is a more-than-worthy successor to the original, a platformer praised for its fast action. Once again, the story—Jazz and his psycho bro Spaz (you can play either) hunting the villainous Devan Shell—is irrelevant. It's all about hyperspastic, escape-velocity action, and plenty of it.

In single-play you race, blast, and leap your way through over 30 differently themed levels: the old-fashioned Colonial Chaos, the trippy Purple Haze, the mechanical Loose Screws, and so on. In 640-by-480, it looks great, with colorful backgrounds and nifty character animations.

The gameplay—running around, grabbing power-ups, fighting not-so-tough bosses—does get repetitive. Thankfully, you can switch among 12 weapons (including an ice blaster, rocket launcher, and pellet gun), and Jazz and Spaz have unique special moves (Jazz's Rayman-ish hover-flight, Spaz's karate kick). Clever level-design helps, too, offering plenty of secret areas. And a built-in level designer lets you make your own scenarios.

To top it off, there are excellent multiplayer options, allowing up to four players on one PC, eight players on two PCs via modem, or 32 players on eight PCs via LAN or Internet. Finding online games is easy—Jazz 2's on WON.net, and there's an automatic server-lookup feature within the game. I logged onto a four-person battle-mode game and was blasting away in no time. There are also CTF, treasure hunt, and race modes.

It all makes for strong old-school platforming with modern graphics and multiplay. For sidescroller fans, Jazz is the *man*. —*Corey Cohen*

JAZZ JACKRABBIT 2

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+ OVERALL

Action the way we like it—nonstop.

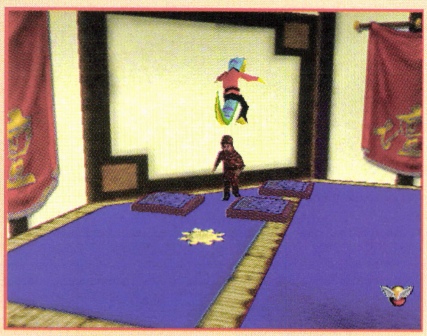
DEVELOPER:	Epic MegaGames
PUBLISHER:	Gathering of Developers 877-463-4263
WEB:	www.jazzjackrabbit.com
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 28.8 modem (min.)
STREET PRICE:	$30

Gex: Enter the Gecko

Leapin' lizards!

Please, not again. If I have to listen to comedian Dana Gould's Gex voice one more time, I'll...I'll...turn the voice off. And keep playing.

After all, there's no reason to let annoying, overly repeated dialogue ("I'm trapped in Boy George's pants"; "Slip of the tongue, baby"—sheesh) spoil this enjoyable update to 1995's awesome Gex. No more 2D sidescrolling: This platformer's third-person 3D, à la Croc and the upcoming Tonic Trouble.



Playin' Karate Kid in Kung-Fu Theater.

Once again, you're stuck in the bizarre Media Dimension, trying to stop bad-guy Rez from wrecking the world's TV. While looking for him, you'll run around one of seven twisted "channels" (gameworlds)—Scream TV, Rocket Channel, Circuit Central—grabbing power-ups and fighting zombies, ninjas, giant flowers, and other nasties. This means whipping your tail, doing a flying karate-kick, or eating power-ups that let you freeze or flame your opponents.

The 3Dfx-only game has some good-looking levels, though Tomb Raider–ish clipping problems abound and Gex tends to look much better than his blocky enemies. Camera control is well done, giving you three ways (fixed camera, tracking camera, and a combination) to view the action. It's a helpful option, useful for tackling tricky jumps or just getting a good sense of where you're at in larger worlds.

Don't spend too much time looking, though. Worlds like Kung-Fu Theater and Toon TV sport creative design and nifty sights, but Gecko's best played Sonic-style to take advantage of the responsive controls.

I really do wish Crystal Dynamics had ditched Gould for the sequel: his quips have little tie to gameplay and seem a weak way of trying to make this a sly, Duke-ish, "adult" game. Forget frills: I'd rather run, jump, smack, and kick. Fortunately, there's enough of that here to go around. —*Corey Cohen*

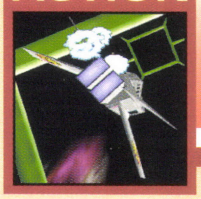
GEX

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	C-

B OVERALL

Too much tongue, but plenty of tail.

PUBLISHER:	Crystal Dynamics
WEB:	www.crystald.com
REQUIRES:	P200, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3Dfx card
RECOMMENDED:	SideWinder gamepad
STREET PRICE:	$40



Ares Rising

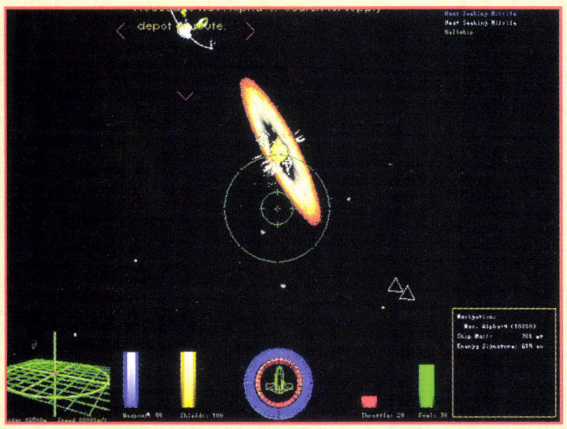
How would you like your starship?

By Barry Brenesal

Say "real-time space-combat sim" to most gamers, and the knee-jerk response is Privateer or Wing Commander. In several ways, these products defined the genre. But although Ares Rising was devised by some of the original Privateer team, this latest RTSCS puts its own distinctive stamp on the model—with excellent results.

Let's begin with spaceships. Privateer's are diversified into several basic models with a spectrum of armaments, but they tend toward a dogfighting ideal. By contrast, you can customize your Lynx craft in Ares Rising over time into almost any kind of vessel you want. There are dozens of weapons available, and equipment bays can hold different types of armor, circuitry, generators, ECMs, decoys, repair units, and so on. Do you prefer frenetic action involving beam weapons and highly maneuverable crafts, or distant spy ships that employ cloaks and probes, firing anti-radiation missiles with sensitive energy detectors?

You start with one ship in Ares Rising, but the gradual addition of multiple wingmen lets you build a fleet. These are pilot mercenaries who mix skill and personality, disobeying your orders on occasion to follow their personal preferences. However, you have a far greater range of orders than in Privateer or Wing Commander, including several dozen weaponry choices, flight formations, and attack modes. (My favorite is the Layered Attack, which involves pilots with long-range weapons using missiles on a distant target while beam-weapon vehicles destroy the shield and mass-cannon ships slice off the armor and hull.)

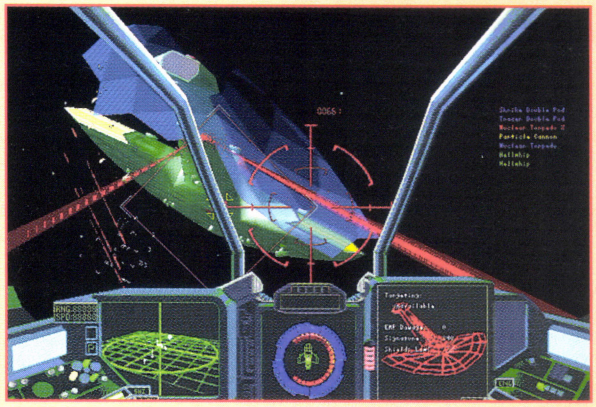


Bull's-eye on the target!

Like similar simulations, Ares Rising has a flat learning curve—vertically. You've got multiple systems, views, and 3D movement to absorb. Fortunately, the manual, reference card, and in-game tutorial are excellent. Still stymied? You can always toggle invulnerability from the Options Menu. The game won't let you win a mission that way, but you can check out everything in god mode before switching back to regular play.

My reaction to the graphics is more mixed. The game has few noninteractive movies, and that's all to the good. The actual space-travel/combat part of Ares Rising is attractive in software-rendered 3D, and a knockout with hardware (Direct3D) acceleration. On the other hand, your character's base of operations and its Series 9000 OS computer, where you access records about political groups, individuals, and equipment purchases, is underwhelming. The computer's records are skimpy, and you're given static, 2D, poorly colored pictures. Finally, you can't dock your ships at any other spaceport. All this reinforces the impression of a blandly uniform universe.

The hokey script doesn't help. (Why does every hero we play in computer games have to talk like some cheesy imitation of 1930s movie detectives?) However, the plot is well-handled, and you can win by eventually allying with any of three main factions, each with its distinct agenda and advantages. The multiplayer game lacks the plot, but it allows you and your pals (up to eight via TCP/IP, null modem, or network) to cooperate against the crafty computer AI or go head to head.



Getting the hang of your craft is tough, so take your time early in the game.

As you can tell, Ares Rising is really no Privateer clone, regardless of its development-team's pedigree. It boldly stakes out a portion of the strategy/action gaming universe—and makes good that claim.

ARES RISING

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B

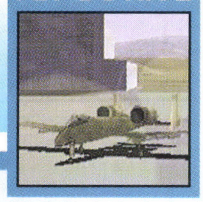
A- OVERALL

Lots of armaments, tough wingmen, three ways to win, sneaky AI, and great graphics.

PUBLISHER:	Imagine Studios 512-371-3700
WEB:	www.imaginestudios.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 150MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 200MB HD, 12x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS

▼ When allied with the wealthy and powerful IPEC you'll get reasonably high-tech military equipment for a good, low price. Watch closely for the occasional prototype that shows up from a captured enemy vessel, though. ▼ The elitist Majyr specialize in all they do, so each piece of equipment they provide is regarded by them as a work of art designed for a specific purpose. It's superb gear, but not often broad-spectrum in its approach. ▼ The honor-driven K'norg have many enemies, but their military hardware is up to the task. Expect plenty of foes and great weaponry if you sign up with this bunch. ▼ Fly all the early missions you can that derive from parties unaffiliated with the three main factions. You want to gain prestige and familiarity with the equipment, and the cash dividends can't hurt. ▼ Customize your wingmen's ships with a spread of equipment so you're ready to meet a variety of challenges. Rest assured, the AI-driven enemy will do the same.



F-22 Total Air War

Stumping on the campaign trail

By Marc Dultz

When it was released several months ago, virtually everyone agreed that F-22 Air Dominance Fighter was one of the most comprehensive and electrifying air-combat simulations ever crafted. Although marred by several flaws—chief among them the lack of a mission planner, inability to configure an aircraft's weapon loadout, and a linear rather than dynamic campaign—ADF nevertheless elegantly and realistically portrayed the all-new F-22 Raptor.

DID's Total Air War seeks to remedy those flaws. Most importantly, it strips away the linear campaign structure in favor of a challenging dynamic battlefield. Each of the 10 campaign games posits a near-term conflagration sometime in the year 2025, set once more in and around the troubled Red Sea region. Newer aircraft types such as the super-secretive Aurora spy plane and the Joint Strike Fighter are portrayed, as are several older aircraft such as the F-14 Tomcat and KC-135 in-flight refueling plane.

Every campaign game in TAW now occurs in real time, meaning you can theoretically sit back and watch the war unfold without stepping onto the tarmac. Moreover, the new campaign structure has been designed to emulate the "five rings of discriminate warfare" espoused by leading US Air Force thinker John Warden in the 1980s. Employed so successfully by General Norman Schwarzkopf in the Gulf War, the theory claimed that a modern-day strategic aerial campaign can be waged against the enemy by identifying, compiling, and sorting all of its potential targets into five distinct categories, or rings. They are leadership, key production centers, infrastructure, population centers, and military forces.

As a result, in TAW you receive the mission, or Air Tasking Orders, based upon your side's level of success throughout the campaign, which is continually monitored and depicted by intelligence-gathering equipment attached to the command HQ. You then attempt to take out the targets, take part in various strike packages or other mission types, or fly on board an AWACS aircraft, vectoring friendly assets to hotspots.

While that new strategic component will be compelling to many, I prefer dogfighting.

The War Room gives you a strategic overview of the aerial campaign.

Bingo fuel? High-flying KC-135 tankers loiter behind the front lines to refuel you.

Fortunately, TAW doesn't disappoint. The flight and weapons modeling are excellent. The result is a sim that's fun and immersive—just as ADF was.

TAW's new custom-combat mission builder is another big plus, letting you create your own battles. The recorded training modules are welcome, too. With the help of the Air Combat Maneuvers Instrumentation, the modules let you see maneuvers in a 3D format.

Aesthetically, TAW's translucent cloud layer is especially noteworthy, but it's the only real graphical improvement to the game. English-speaking foreign nationals are still hard to understand, and the rudder keys seem particularly unresponsive during taxiing.

True-3D clouds are among the many improvements to the overall system.

While the head-to-head multiplayer missions are entertaining, try out the new cooperative mode, which lets you buddy up with your favorite wingie. Internet, IPX, and TCP/IP network connections are supported, as are serial and modem links. Access to DWANGO, Mpath, TEN, and Wireplay is also available.

The real question is whether the publishers are justified in selling TAW as a full-priced product. It's certainly a deeply engrossing sim—but if you own ADF, you've got to step back for a moment and ask yourself the age-old question, "At what price glory?"

F-22 TOTAL AIR WAR

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
3D ACCELERATED:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B

A- OVERALL

Exciting, absorbing sim that feels like an upgrade at a full-game price.

DEVELOPER:	Digital Image Design
PUBLISHER:	Ocean 408-289-1411
WEB:	www.DID.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 70MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 205MB HD, 3Dfx or AGP-bus–based accelerator card, 8x CD-ROM drive, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ When establishing waypoints, make sure your aircraft use nap-of-the-earth tactics to mask their intended flight path. The waypoint profile window proves invaluable because it provides a 2D representation of any elevation changes to the terrain.

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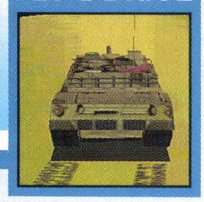


Spearhead

Striking with the blunt edge

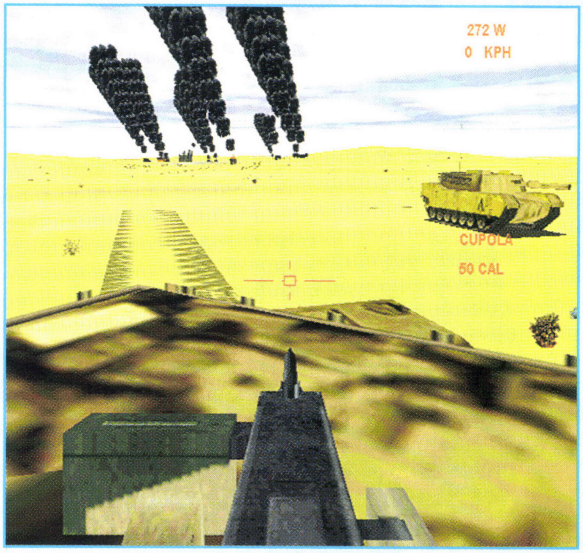
By Marc Dultz

I-Magic's second armored-warfare sim based upon the venerable M1A2 Abrams battle-tank is a less demanding look at the updated Abrams than either MicroProse's M1 Tank Platoon II or I-Magic's own iM1A2 Abrams. Unlike those titles, Spearhead models just the external viewpoint for each of the four-man crew, not including their interior work stations.

Although you can hop about within the tank—moving from the gunner's position to the driver's station and from the loader's position to the tank-commander's cupola—you never get the sense you're truly operating a mammoth 70-ton war-wagon. Curiously, you not only fire the weapons—manning the guns from either the gunner's position or the commander's station using the CITV (Commander's Independent Thermal-Viewer)—but you also drive the vehicle, identify targets, and decide which of two ammo types to load.

As far as premises go, the Tunisian theater of operations serves as the backdrop for yet another desert conflict set sometime in the not-too-distant future. US forces led by the 3rd Armored Division serve alongside various Tunisian armed forces as they desperately attempt to ward off an invading Libyan army that's pushing headlong toward Tunis. As the commander of a US armored contingent, your objective is to halt the enemy's advance, protect certain vital interests, and finally drive the enemy back to the Tunisian/Libyan border. The enemy is equipped with lethal T-80 tanks shielded by reactive armor cells. As a result, they put up a stubborn fight, although the M1A2 still outclasses the T-80 by a long shot.

Spearhead purportedly incorporates SIMNET technology, a low-end version of what the Department of Defense uses to help train its tankers. To this end, the game has been designed from the ground up to be multiplayer-compliant (LAN, modem, Internet) and features dynamically constructed single-player missions that randomly relocate the enemy's initial starting position.



The commander's perspective. Although it's dramatic, you don't feel you're operating a monstrous steel chariot.

However, despite its origins, many of the sophisticated digital systems and other instrumentation developed for the M1A2 have been dispensed with, evidently in an effort to cut down on your workload. Some data—such as turret and tank facing, speed rate, and relative compass heading—are even superimposed at the top of each crewmember's screen to serve as orientation and navigational aids rather than authentic devices. What's more, you can't preset or change the platoon's formation, although you can redeploy each combat unit on the simplified Inter-Vehicular Information System. Apparently, the designers felt it was more important to stress action over realism, making several important design concessions that place the game more on a par with Armored Fist 2.

Aesthetically, Spearhead's terrain and effects are no match for M1 Tank Platoon II's. The different terrain sets are bland and featureless. While certain pyrotechnic effects (exploding tanks and eerie light-amplification gear) are especially well handled, others (tank-generated smoke grenades) seem to have been halfheartedly rendered. And although the game uses radio chatter derived from actual SIMNET exercises, its effects are limited to enhancing atmosphere.

When you get right down to it, M1 Tank Platoon II is clearly the superior sim, outclassing Spearhead in virtually every conceivable category. Despite its genesis, this is one oversimplified war casualty perhaps best left for dead on the battlefield.

Light-amplification equipment picks out an armored column as it inches its way forward into the night.

SPEARHEAD

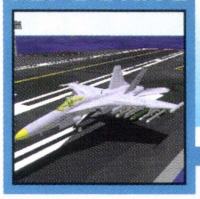
GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C+
3D ACCELERATED:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C+

C+ OVERALL

Doesn't unseat M1 Tank Platoon II.

DEVELOPER:	MÄK Technologies/Zombie VR
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 55MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 80MB HD, 3Dfx/PowerVR/AGP card, 8x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Since the M1A2's armor is thickest along the front and sides, it's always a good idea to engage the enemy when the front of your tank is facing them. ▼ The M1A2's fire-control system is far superior to the one in the T-80 battle tank. Therefore, it makes sense to engage the enemy from as far away as possible (3,000 meters), slowly withdrawing as they close the distances.



iF/A-18E Carrier Strike Fighter

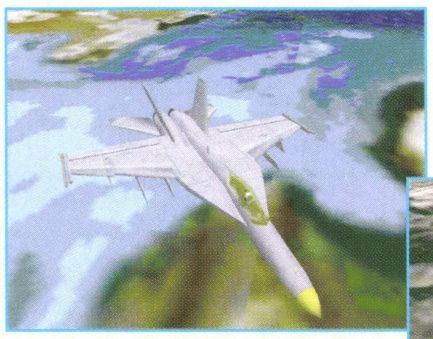
CAT shots, bolters, and bugs

By Andy Mahood

Memo to Interactive Magic: Hi guys. It's time to ditch that clunky DEMON terrain-mapping engine you've been trying to spoon-feed us since iF-22's release late last year. It's a lemon. Your valiant patching history is noted and appreciated, but it's time to wake up and smell the 3Dfx.

If it weren't for the hobbling effects of its graphics framework, I'd be praising I-Magic's new iF/A-18E Carrier Strike Fighter as one of the best new flight sims in years. Boasting an exhaustively detailed avionics package, a first-rate flight model, and one of the best dynamic-campaign engines on the market, it does a bang-up job of bringing the US Navy's imposing new 21st-century F/A-18E Super Hornet to the PC.

iF/A-18E offers a variety of play options, including a training simulator, instant action, and head-to-head multiplayer competition over serial/modem, network, or TCP/IP Internet connection. The real fun starts once you begin your career as a naval aviator. A pair of fully dynamic campaigns—in the Persian Gulf or the Aegean Sea—tests your ability at earning promotions and medals while performing wartime carrier-flight operations in both day and night conditions.



The DEMON terrain can be very ugly...

But despite its notable advances in the field of flight modeling, avionics, and AI, iF/A-18E has more than its fair share of glitches. In my first six hours with the game, I faced more than a dozen lockups. Numerous cold reboots and several reinstalls later, I've been able to get part way into some engrossing campaign action, but I still keep my fingers nervously

Turning around to land. Inset is the detailed point-and-click cockpit.

crossed on the joystick with every CAT launch. In addition, the ACLS (Automated Carrier Landing System) is buggy and unreliable, your wingmen constantly execute Blue Angel–type barrel rolls while flying in formation, and enemy missiles are much too easy to spoof with flares and chaff. But these are patchable offenses that pale in comparison to the game's more serious graphic problems.

I-Magic's DEMON engine seems to be developing some brand new vices beyond the ones that were patched in the company's earlier products. Although there are no more of iF-22's terrain-loading pauses, the lockups and crashes show little or no sign of clearing up after a year-long massage.

The D3D-fueled graphics also produced some very strange anomalies on my machine,

...or very attractive.

such as airstrips floating several hundred feet in the air and 200-foot mountains of water surrounding the carrier. Even when they seem to be behaving properly, the visuals aren't even close to being in the same league as 3Dfx-powered titles like F-15 and Joint Strike Fighter. There are no cool night-time lighting effects from missile shots, exploding surface targets emit uniformly unspectacular geysers of smoke, and—carrying on an unfortunate legacy from iF-22—I could swear that the sun, horizon, and clouds in the game were drawn in with a blunt crayon.

I can appreciate I-Magic's loyalty to its much-maligned terrain engine, but if they ever have the courage to swap it for a more stable, generic system like the one used in Jane's F-15, add a 3Dfx patch, and fix a few small bugs, iF/A-18E could be the best naval-aviation sim on the market.

IF/A-18E CARRIER STRIKE FIGHTER

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	D+
GRAPHICS:	C-
3D ACCELERATED:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B

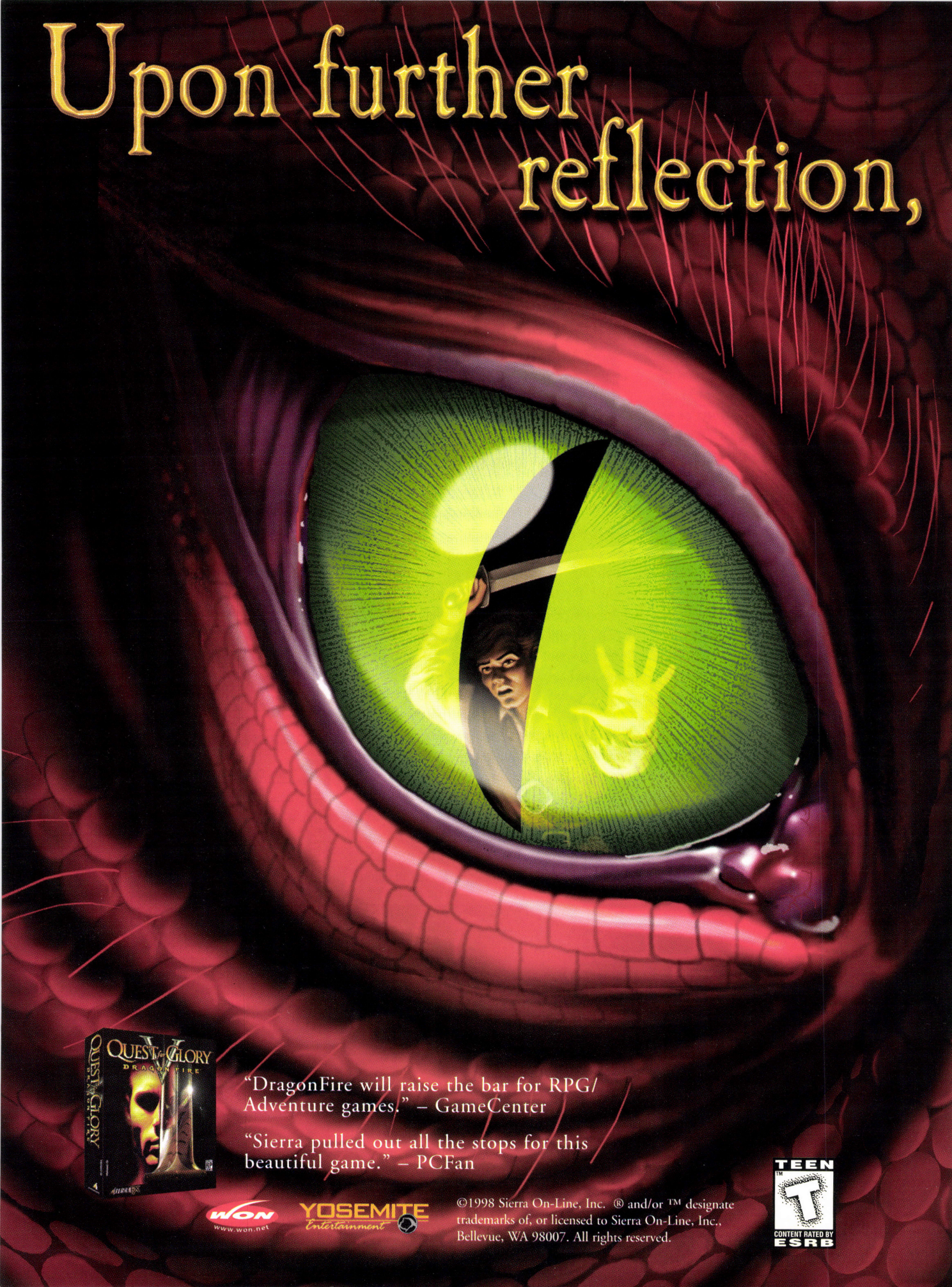
B- OVERALL

A-list sim gets demoted several ranks for poor graphics and unstable coding.

PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 24MB RAM, 150MB HD, 2MB 1024-by-768 SVGA, 8x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	PII 266, 32MB RAM, 4MB 3D card, 12x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Remember to tweak the plane's loadout before taking off. The preset ordnance packages almost always give you and your wingmen incorrect fuel loads. ▼ If the mission goals permit, always take a couple of HARM anti-radar missiles to deal with pesky SAM sites. You'll increase your survivability tremendously. ▼ The game contains a bug that'll explode your plane four seconds after you successfully trap on the carrier (when using the realistic flight-model). To avoid this, hit Ctrl-Q as soon as you come to a stop. A patch is in the works.

Upon further reflection,



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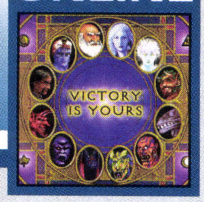


Sanctum

Magic-style chess

By Barry Brenesal

How about some online fantasy-based card gaming? No, not from Magic: The Gathering. Sanctum is a lot less ambitious—it doesn't even have sound effects—but it's ultimately more successful.

Sanctum is played on a map with two home bases (called sanctums) representing yourself and your antagonist. Each begins with a number of archers and swordsmen, plus unassigned recruits who can be trained for combat or mana production. There are also five neutral towns on the map. Control of these grants additional mana used to empower spells, so most games resolve very early into a tense battle for the town that lies at dead center.

There are six types of mana, grouped in pairs (primary and secondary) to form all of Sanctum's 12 "suits," called Houses. Your choice of House determines the 19 spells, represented by cards, which you can cast during a game. There are 228 cards available, and each side builds a deck of 30. (You can incorporate up to four of any given card in a playing deck, and you can create and store as many disparate decks offline as you want using the Deckbuilder option in Sanctum's software.) Enclosing cards from other Houses means more spell diversity but requires different kinds of mana—which prove more difficult to supply.

Examine your cards in the offline database using filters and sorts.

House spells are nicely individualized, much as in M:TG. Lightning bolts are found in the Nature Deck, while fireballs are found in War; and each produces a different damage result. Each House furnishes its own advantages. Despair can deny your opponent his movement turn or access to recruits and towns, while Death summons skeletons, plague, and desert.

Right-click to see a card's effects, left–double-click to cast.

Playing different decks assembled from the Houses requires a variety of winning strategies.

Unlike M:TG, Sanctum's card palace is somewhat asymmetrical. Most players going for a win know that Death, Justice, Despair, and War work far better than Hope, Life, or Mind—sure signs that some balancing is still needed.

There are map algorithm problems, too. While many maps generated on the fly are reasonably designed, mixing plains, forest, water, mountain, and swamp tiles, other arrangements appear from time to time that strongly favor one side. A seasoned player will submit to the fate of a bad card-draw because they built the deck themselves; not so with the maps, over which they have no control.

As it's currently structured, Sanctum provides two tournament areas: one that tracks wins and losses, and one that doesn't. A rating system for players exists, but you have to buy $20 worth of cards online to be considered registered. While you can download the Sanctum client and a starter pack for free at **www.digitaladdiction.com** (it's also on this month's CD), you'll have to fork over around $60 or more to be truly competitive in the rated area.

In all, Sanctum pleases. It offers armies and spells, multiple strategies, attractive if unspectacular graphics, and the chance to measure up against that most dangerous of opponents: Humans. It runs swiftly over the Internet without a hitch. The initial learning curve is rather high until you acquire familiarity with the cards, but you can always study these offline. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a challenge pending with a player from New Zealand.

SANCTUM

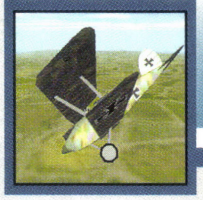
GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	N/A

B
OVERALL

Smaller, friendlier, and better than M:TG.

PUBLISHER:	Digital Addiction
WEB:	www.digitaladdiction.com
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 800-by-600 res., 28.8 modem
STREET PRICE:	Free online, includes 60-card starter deck; 15-card booster packs from $3 for one to $40 for 40

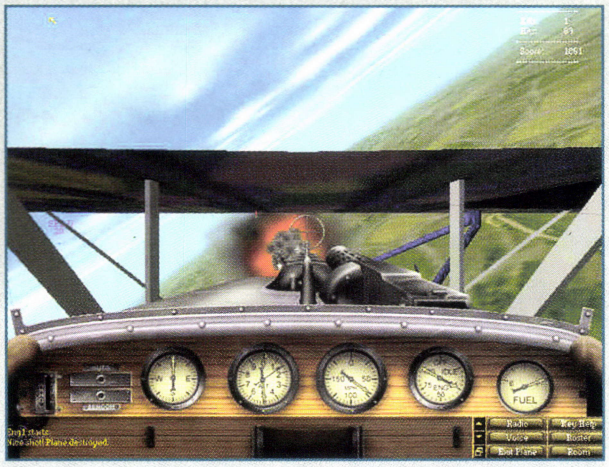
TIPS ▼ Cast small spells early on, even if they provide negligible advantages. You can only access five cards in your hand at a time, and you want to get your killer spells to the top of the deck as quickly as the random draw permits. ▼ Since control of the central town is so important, build a deck with several cards that either boost your armies' traveling speed or deny movement to your foes. Monster-summoning cards will do the latter by standing in the way of your opponent's forces, and they have the nice bonus of wreaking havoc.



Dawn of Aces

Gentlemen warriors

By Andy Mahood



Wood and cloth seem to burn extremely well when mixed with bullets.

Feeling a lot like George Peppard in *The Blue Max*, I swaggered onto I-Magic Online's Web site, fired up my Albatros D.Va, and completed my takeoff roll into the French skies in search of fresh Allied cannon-fodder. Three minutes later I was spiraling to my death in a cloud of engine smoke with half of my port wing shot to pieces. This scenario would repeat itself several times in I-Magic's new online WWI fighter-sim Dawn of Aces before I swallowed my pride and decided to get a little more offline training.

Dawn is I-Magic's new companion to its critically acclaimed WWII-based WarBirds series. Grafting the tried-and-true WB engine onto a WWI sim is sure to be a popular move with biplane aficionados whose online options presently rest somewhere between slim and none. The purity of the seat-of-the-pants aerial combat between these historic wood-and-fabric planes provides a challenge that few modern flight-sims can match.

The DOA software is available as a free download from IMOL's Web site (8MB for the main client, 3MB for additional art—it's all on this month's PC Games.exe). Once it's installed, you can set up an account that'll give you five hours of access per month, with additional time billed at $1.99 per hour. Although pricier than competing WWII-themed sites like GameStorm's Air Warrior III and Microsoft's Fighter Ace (which offer unlimited time for $10 a month), the sophisticated flight modeling and high level of challenge that comes from taking on the best virtual pilots on the Net certainly haven't stunted the growth of I-Magic's similarly priced WarBirds.

Departing from the multiple-country scenario of WB, DOA offers participants the option of flying for the Allies or Central Powers. There are only six planes available at this stage of the game's development, but each exhibits its own unique flight characteristics with some authentic physics modeling that will challenge even the most grizzled veterans. Unfortunately, other than an option to form squadrons or jump into a tail-gunner/observer position in the Bristol F.2B or Halberstadt CLII, the game is a pure dogfighter and contains none of WarBirds' tactical bombing strategy.

DOA offers both Full Realism and Relaxed Realism arenas, but the biggest problem at the time of this review—shortly after the game's launch—is the absolute poverty of online players. After several visits to the site, I have yet to see more than a dozen or so people logged in, in stark contrast to the crowded WB arenas. This definitely cuts back on the sim's entertainment factor, but it's probably too early to say whether it's the price, the lack of planes, or simply the newness of the game.

All in all, Aces has quite a bit going for it. It plays well over a modem. The accelerated D3D graphics, although not spectacular, are pleasing to the eye. The flight model is authentically tricky and difficult to master, and the game's burgeoning, WarBirds-like community of online pilots is slowly building. This sense of community was clearly demonstrated to me by BruceC, a pilot from the UK who patiently walked me through several spin-recovery techniques in a private session. I still may not be as cool as George Peppard, but at least I don't feel like George Costanza anymore!

The exterior view can only be accessed during offline practice.

DAWN OF ACES

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	C
3D ACCELERATED:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B
OVERALL

If you've got the cash and the talent, you may ace this high-flying WWI sim.

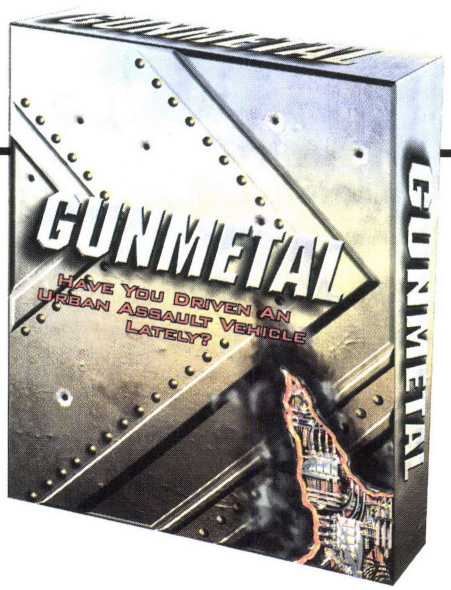
DEVELOPER:	I-Magic Online
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagiconline.com
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM (32MB RAM for D3D version), 17MB HD (49MB if using high-res artwork), 9600 baud modem
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	Free download; $9.95/month for first 5 hours, $1.99/hr. after that. New members get 5 free hours.

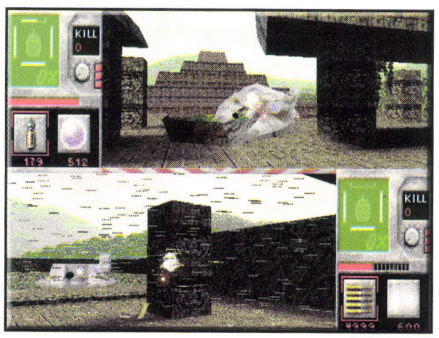
TIPS

▼ You'll be easy pickings if you rely solely on the stick and throttle. If you can't afford rudder pedals, map some easy-to-reach keys or joystick buttons to emulate rudder control.

▼ You may get an extremely low online frame-rate if you have a newer version of Internet Explorer 4.0 loaded on your machine—it messes up your system's Winsock files. They can be restored by running a file called ws2bakup.bat located in the ws2bakup directory in Windows. (If an Abort/Retry/Fail error message occurs when you're running this file, just hit Fail and it'll complete successfully.) Reboot the computer, and you're done.

Have You Driven An Urban Assault Vehicle Lately?





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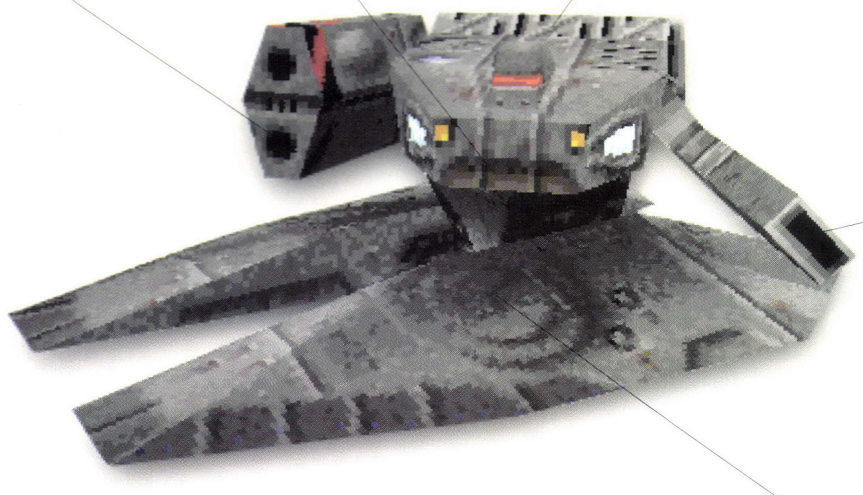

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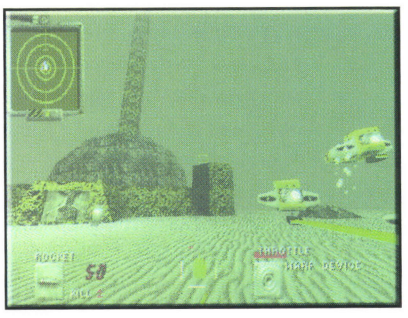

TEEN
T
AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

All Nataka Remotely Piloted Vehicles ship with version 56.9 of BattleHelper, Nataka's award-winning operating system. Some vehicles not exactly as shown. All performance specifications given for unencumbered vehicles in 1 G of gravitational force and 101.9 kPa of barometric pressure unless otherwise indicated. BattleHelper is a registered product of the Nataka Corporate Empire. Unauthorized use of the BattleHelper name is a violation of applicable treaties and will be met with military force. Gunmetal™ and Mad Genius Software™ are trademarks of Mad Genius Software Ltd.

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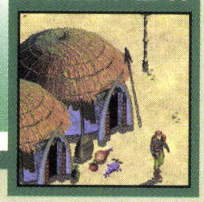

Dink SmallWood

RPG adventuring with a wink

By Barry Brenesal

Dink SmallWood lives with his mother on the edge of the woods. He dreams of battles with swords and magic, even as he feeds the pigs. Thus beginneth the saga of a young man with a big mouth and even bigger dreams of glory.

As the title suggests, Dink is not a game that takes the fantasy genre very seriously. Unlike Discworld II, it does accept the genre's basic conventions—humble-hero beginnings, maidens in distress, powerful wizard mentors, and so on. But it kids as it ambles along. Where else will you find a pet duck, who's been scolded for running away, replying, "Bite me"? Dink is a game with a heavy dose of attitude.

When weapons fail, magic may help.

Nice shading and texture effects conceal the game's 256-color origins.

It's also a hybrid: an RPG, real-time graphics adventure with combat elements. It's not all action like Ecstatica II—the interface and command set are deliberately simple, and combat maneuvers require nothing more than pressing Ctrl to attack and Shift to cast. What you get is a balance of weapons-based and magical combat with primitive problem-solving that hearkens back to a spate of products issued in the early '90s, of which SSI's The Awakening was the most well received.

By keeping the number and variety of objects low for any of Dink's 600-plus screens, the developers made 256 colors go a long way. Textures and coloring are stylish, apart from a poor inventory screen. On the other hand, the characters don't really walk across the terrain: they skate over it. There are no voiceovers, a real drawback considering the humorous dialogue; but the music (which includes popular classical selections by Schubert and Debussy, among others) is well chosen.

My response to Dink's dialogue options was decidedly chillier. They provoke the complaint often lodged (with justification) at computer-initiated dialogue trees: they're only for show. Dink can accept a quest or turn it down—but did you really buy the game to turn down quests? A bunch of hidden attitude meters among the game's characters based on loyalties and antipathies would've gone a long way toward offering some real variety.

More problematically, Dink's dialogue and combat mechanisms are apparently unrelated. On a few occasions, a character would show up for conversation while Dink was being killed by monsters. Instead of helping out, the person would completely ignore (and was ignored by) the critters as they dismembered poor Dink. Thanks for the help, guy.

Fortunately, you don't have to speak to characters in monster-laden surroundings, but this incident points to the game's intolerance of attempting things outside a single predetermined solution. There's only one way to destroy the duck idol, for instance, and it's farfetched. To make things harder, save games are possible only at a few designated places.

I like Dink's combination of graphics adventure and real-time combat. Its visuals are dated but attractive, and its humor is infectious. But with Quest for Glory V and other upcoming titles promising an identical mix at a much higher level of involvement (more spells, more attack/defense options, better visuals and sound, important branching, etc.), Dink seems more a pleasant and inexpensive stopgap than a prime purchase. Still, with free add-on adventures available at RTSoft's Web site (along with a game demo, which is on this month's CD), you'll likely get a few good chuckles for your $20.

DINK SMALLWOOD

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	C-

C+ OVERALL

Engaging hero carries this hybrid.

PUBLISHER:	RTSoft 888-218-3881
WEB:	www.rtsoft.com
REQUIRES:	486/75, 24MB RAM, 50MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P60
STREET PRICE:	$20

TIPS ▼ If a character gives you directions, follow them explicitly. ▼ The acorn tree is to the east and south of the village entrance. The wizard's hut is to the east and north. After visiting the hut, head south and west. The chest holds a heart container that will increase your life potential. Search for other chests that hold food or hearts to fill the container up. ▼ The best way to deal with the Bonca: apply hit-and-run tactics. ▼ Buy a longsword in town as soon as you can, and equip it in your inventory screen. ▼ Don't explore the Goblin Sanctuary until you've gotten Bow Lore.

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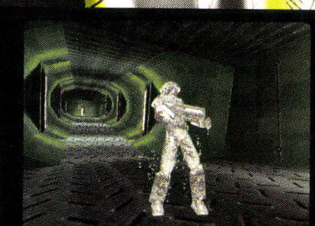
"Requiem's strong storyline and different subject matter should turn the head of anyone remotely interested in 3D-gaming" - PC Gamer



"Requiem is vying to be one of the best first-person games (it's far more than just a shooter) to be released this winter" - PC World

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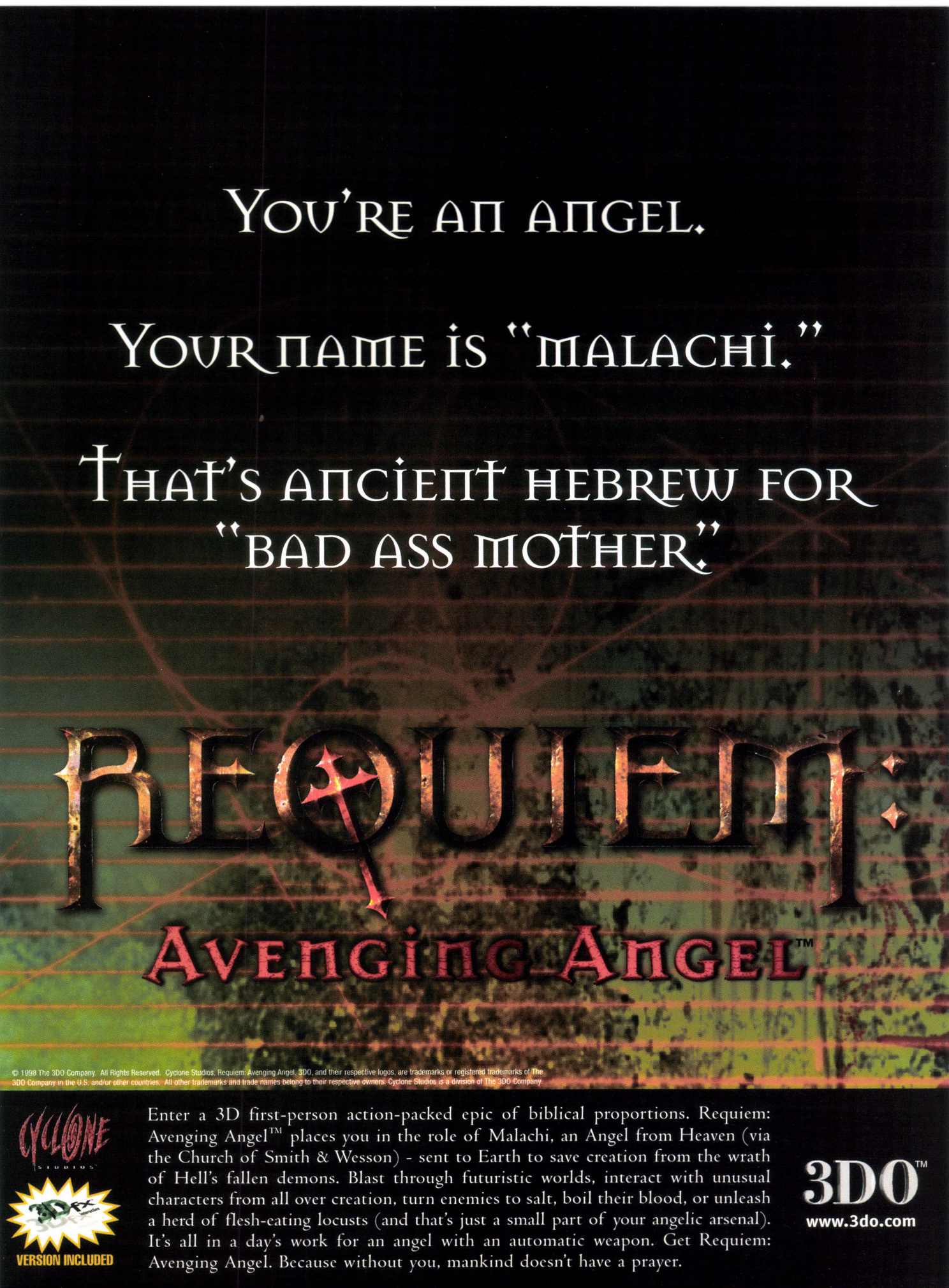
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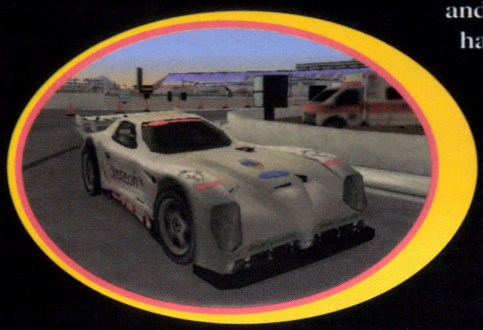

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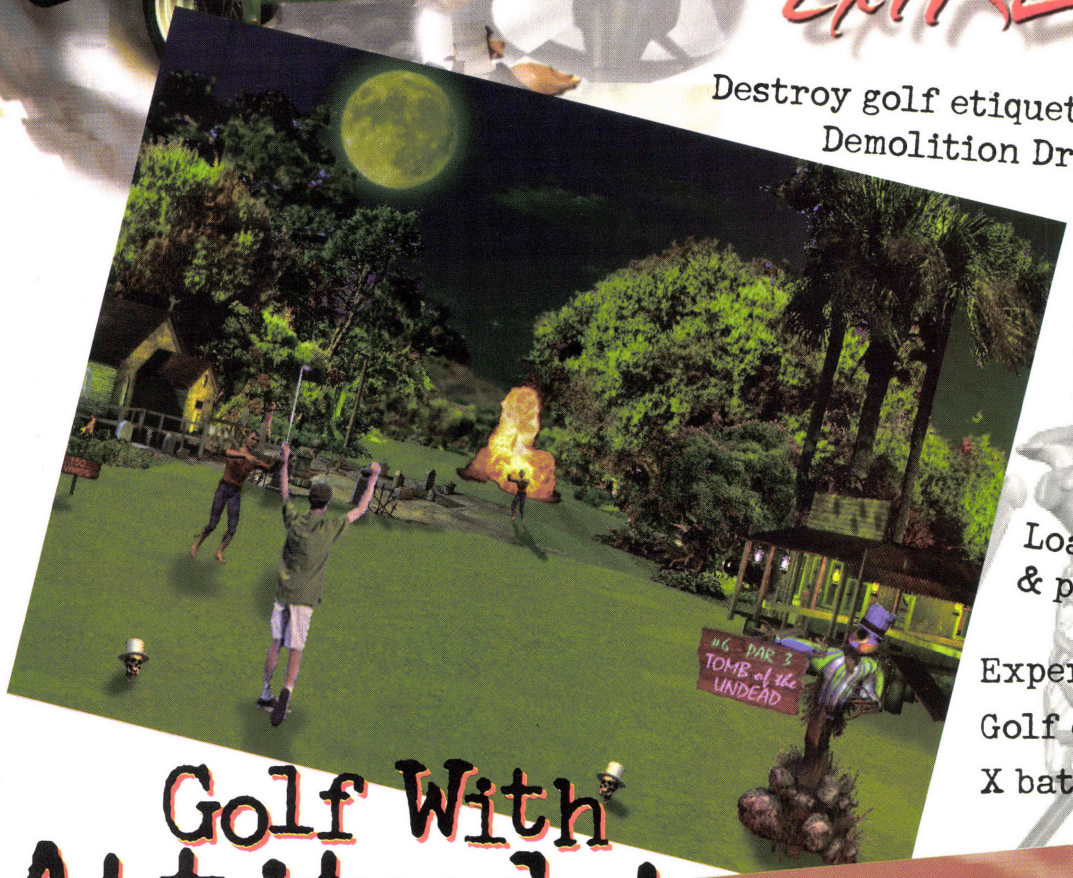

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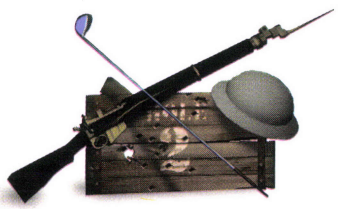

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NFL GameDay '99

Hut, hut, hiiiiiike. Hey, I said hike!

By Willem Knibbe

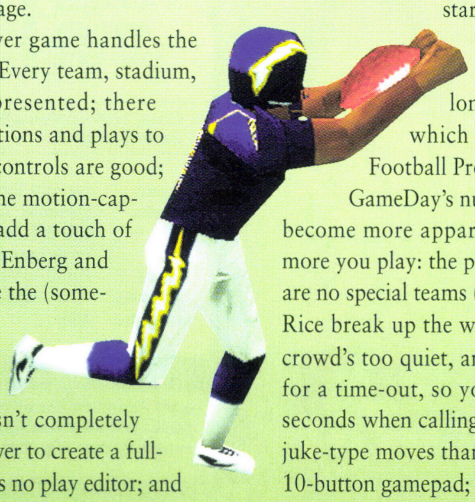
Ever get tickets to the big game, look forward to it for months, then arrive at the stadium to find out your favorite player pulled a hamstring in warm-ups and isn't going to play?

That's the kind of disappointment clouding my view of NFL GameDay '99. When 989 Studios (formerly Sony Interactive Studios) announced it was porting the franchise from PlayStation to PC, it hyped GD's TCP/IP play and matching service, 989studios.net.

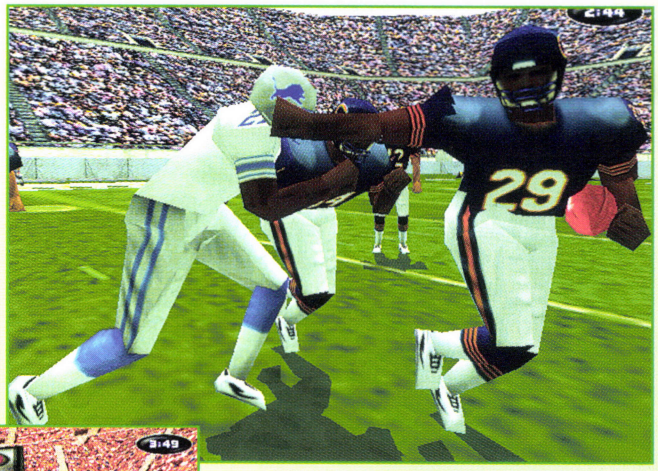
Whoa! No more coaching-mode only—they were talking head-to-head, action gameplay over the Internet and a Battle.net–type service with a good interface. Given that sports games rely so heavily on split-second button presses and the Internet remains an unpredictable, laggy beast, I tried to contain my excitement and evince an air of skepticism. The developers assured me that since GD was using the time-tested Tanarus networking code, it'd work over a modem.

It doesn't—though in a backpedal, the manual calls for a high-speed Internet connection. I doubt it would make a difference, as there was lag even on LAN and ISDN games. Via a 56K modem, it's unplayable. Players flit in and out, there are frequent "Waiting for Server" messages, and controlling players is more guesswork than skill. Whoever creates the game acts as the server (and experiences less lag), and thus has a clear advantage.

The single-player game handles the basics fairly well. Every team, stadium, and player is represented; there are tons of formations and plays to choose from; the controls are good; the action's fast; the motion-captured animations add a touch of realism; and Dick Enberg and Phil Simms handle the (somewhat repetitive) commentary just fine.



GameDay doesn't completely harness a PC's power to create a full-fledged sim. There's no play editor; and while you can create, draft, and trade players, there's no financial model or other real-world constraints—you could trade your back-up guard for John Elway. Signing free agents is a matter of highlighting the guy you want and a player you're willing to part with, then clicking Sign. You're essentially trading with the free-agent pool.



When timed correctly, the stiff-arm will put a defender flat on his back.

The stadiums are realistically rendered.

But GameDay never staked its claim as a full-fledged sim; its forte is arcade-style football. If it existed in a vacuum, I'd say it's pretty fun. But I've played an early version of EA's Madden 99, and it not only looks and plays better than GameDay, but it's also starting to add sim features that were previously the sole domain of Sierra's long-running franchise, which has been renamed Football Pro.

GameDay's numerous shortcomings become more apparent and annoying the more you play: the players are blocky, there are no special teams (I cringed watching Jerry Rice break up the wedge on a kickoff), the crowd's too quiet, and there's no quick-key for a time-out, so you'll lose at least five seconds when calling one. There are more juke-type moves than keys on a standard 10-button gamepad; and the most frequent tackle animation—the defender riding on the ball-carrier's back, dragging him down—is often inappropriate. When my 300-pound lineman slams into your 180-pound back at the line of scrimmage, he shouldn't be towed along like a sack of potatoes.

Still, console players may like the familiar feel of this port, and 989 does get some credit for trying to implement TCP/IP multiplay in such an Internet-unfriendly genre. Maybe they can get id to do a GameDayWorld version.

NFL GAMEDAY '99

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	D+
SOUND CHECK:	B

C+ OVERALL

Too many fumbles to be a Super Bowl contender.

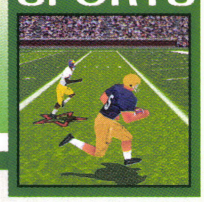
PUBLISHER:	989 Studios 888-426-3702
WEB:	www.989studios.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 32MB RAM, 75MB HD, D3D card, 8x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ The fullback is almost always open on the Pro Split, Quick Outs play.

▼ The stiff-arm is the best way to get around the corner on sweeps. Just make sure you're not stiff-arming with your ball hand, or you'll fumble.

▼ It's easier to pass in Total Control mode than in Arcade or Sim mode. When your receiver's in an open spot, slightly underthrow (down on the D-pad) him to make him stop before reaching defenders in a zone defense.



NCAA Football 99

Big-time college feel

By Willem Knibbe

NCAA Football 99 has the gameplay and big-time college football trappings to keep fans happy til long after the championship's settled.

Normally I don't care too much about sim stuff in football—get me on the field—but NCAA's Dynasty mode brings the quirkiness of a college football season and its rankings to your PC. You pick any of the 112 Division I-A teams from 10 conferences and take it through the season, playing the 1998 schedule. It's fun to watch your team climb up the CBS SportsLine ratings (this game's only national poll) and vie for either the Fiesta, Sugar, Orange, or Rose Bowls. (EA's licensing department was busy, as these bowls are here exclusively—unfortunately, they come complete with their corporate sponsors.) There are also seven fictional post-season contests, like the EA Bowl.

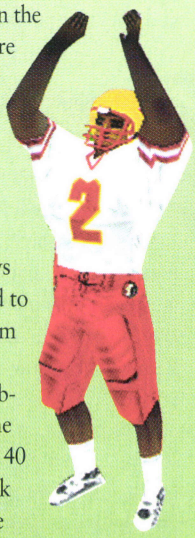
The zoom-in after the snap puts you in the trenches but makes it tough to get an overview of the action.

After you complete the season, there's a recruiting model so you can replace graduating seniors—unless you get fired, in which case you'll get another job offer at a lesser school. You then start the 1999 season with a new, dynamically created schedule. You can keep your dynasty going for over 200 seasons.

While there's no play editor, there are plenty of plays and formations, including the Wishbone, Power-I, and others you find only in the college game. A nicely implemented interface lets you easily pick deviations of each formation (e.g., One Back, One Back Spread, One Back Slot). Similarly, on the play-calling screen, a left or right tap on the D-pad slightly alters alignments and pass routes while Button 8 flips plays.

The polygonal players have a believable solidity about them, and their animations look great (the play-action and pump fakes would make Brett Favre proud), though they do seem to sort of float above the field. This is especially apparent when a running back gets caught behind a bunch of his own blockers. His legs churn and churn, but he's goin' nowhere fast.

The biggest gameplay flaw is the default low camera-angle that zooms in on the quarterback once the ball's hiked. It's great for running plays up the middle, but it makes it impossible to see what the outside linebackers and cornerbacks are doing. The camera pulls back once you call up the passing icons, but on quick slants or fades, that can be too late. Defensively, the zoomed-in camera-angles make it tough to blitz from the corners or figure out what angle to take to catch up to a ball carrier who's streaking down the sidelines. There are eight other angles, but only the Upper Deck one is usable, and then you feel too far from the action.



Other flaws include the inability to remap your keys and multiplay that's limited to LAN and modem-to-modem action play.

But those are minor quibbles when looking at all the nice touches in this game: the 40 classic matchups dating back to 1946, practice mode, the ability to create your own tourney, savable replays, the ability to scroll backward and forward through your defenders before a play—the list goes on and on.

Hit C and you get either a speed burst or a devastating stiff-arm.

What NCAA 99 does best is make you feel like you're at a college game. Rather than go with a TV-style presentation with two announcers, it has Rose Bowl announcer Chuck White proclaiming the result of the plays after they happen, stadium-style. The atmosphere is also enhanced by the 60 fight songs and team-specific crowd chants. It's the next best thing to being on the sidelines on a crisp Saturday afternoon.

NCAA FOOTBALL 99

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	C
3D ACCELERATED:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B-
OVERALL

Great atmosphere and features, bad camera-angles.

DEVELOPER:	Farsight Technologies
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.easports.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 5MB HD
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 55MB HD, D3D card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ In a 4-3, your middle linebacker can often hit the gap between the center and guard. A well-timed dive will give you a sack. ▼ Doug Pierce's Web site at **www.wbfx.com/ncaa99/** is a great resource for news, leagues, tips, and such.

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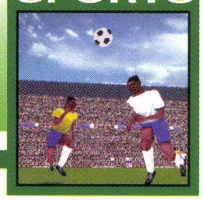


Sensible Soccer '98

Coach your way around the world

By Daniel Morris

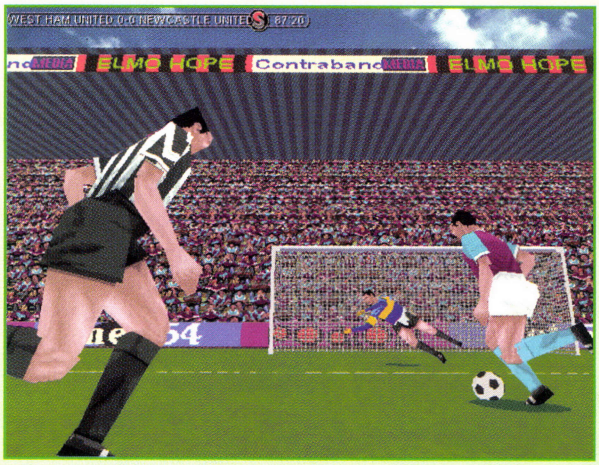
What is one to expect from a sports title that begins with the word Sensible? Sensible Soccer '98 is a European import from GT Interactive, apparently so-named because of its down-to-business, coach-centric gameplay. And, come to think of it, I'm hard-pressed to find a better adjective to describe this soccer game. It's sensible.

The meat and potatoes of SS98 are the deep and extensive coaching and customizability options. Represented are fully customizable leagues for every major world pro league, as well as international squads for Cup competition (no licenses, though, and no real players until you customize them). The level of tailoring is remarkable, right down to the kit colors and physical appearance of each player.

This is wonderful stuff for gamers who like to be in godlike control of their computer sports teams. There are no multiseason elements, unfortunately, which was a wasted opportunity. But you can organize all manner of league championship races and international tournaments, with your choice of how teams advance: single elimination or best of three, and you can turn on or off golden-goal elimination.

Gameplay itself doesn't even pretend to be at the brilliant level of FIFA 98 or World Cup 98, but for what it's meant to do, it's serviceable. The game stresses realism, which almost assures that the matches are hard-fought, methodical, low-scoring affairs. It's best enjoyed from the bird's-eye perspective, giving you the coach's more authoritative sensibility as opposed to the more visceral EA-style presentation.

The games are often very accurately portrayed, with highly realistic play-sets, organization, and defensive breakdowns. Particularly thrilling are the goalie animations, which are really convincing in the in-close scrambles. Careful and elaborate passing will be required to gain ground, and you'll need to develop perfect touch on your shots to score anything—which is as it should be.



The keeper guesses low as he challenges an open shooter.

Where Sensible Soccer '98 really shines is in its coaching mode. You can play as Coach only and steer your team from the sidelines, changing formations and making decisions about aggressiveness and defensive posture. The decisions translate nicely onto the pitch. And it's a pleasure to watch the computer opponent react to your coaching moves and force you into the chess-match of warring coachdom that any real-life soccer game actually becomes. Multiplayer options add this nice coaching dimension to head-to-head play.

The international rosters can be customized to reflect either actual players or your own made-up footballers.

But as endearing as the game's accuracy and coaching options are, SS98 is constantly reminding you that it's not in EA's league. The on-field 3D graphics are a notch below, with blocky players. The interface is very crude and unfriendly—it's never simple doing anything. You'll spend a lot of time arranging things the way you want them, and simple errors can undo minutes of work.

Ultimately, there's no dazzling finish to anything in the game. Plowing your way to a championship is not the stunning triumph it seems to be in EA's FIFA games; rather, here it just seems like the logical tacked-on conclusion. The game suffers from a definite lack of presence and immediacy.

What it's got going for it is a bargain price and a coaching mode for convincingly realistic soccer games. I can't say it got me much worked up, though. The fact is that EA has spoiled us silly with its FIFA series, and Sensible Soccer '98 looks, by comparison, like...well, like sensible shoes when we've got some blue suede ones sitting right next to them.

SENSIBLE SOCCER '98

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS:	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	C+

C+ OVERALL

Sensible pick for armchair soccer coaches.

DEVELOPER:	Sensible Software
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.gtgames.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 25MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 110MB HD, 8x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS

▼ Goalies can usually make good outlet kicks along the wings. Aim out to the side and curve the kick upfield to start a counterattack. ▼ You can one-time centering kicks with your head by pressing the Shoot button when the centering pass is still in midflight. ▼ Let the keeper handle slow-rolling balls near the goal. If you pick it up with the defender, you're liable to cough it up in-close. ▼ By learning to kick curving shots, you can sometimes score from well out. Practice big, booming kicks that twist to the far post.

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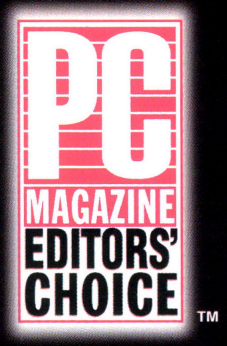

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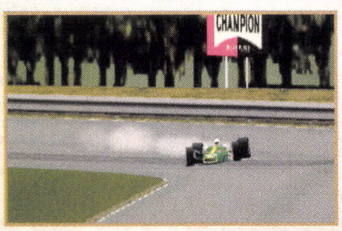
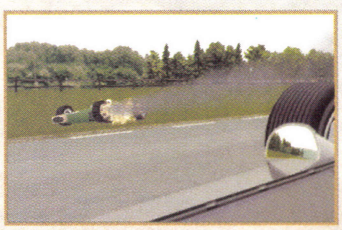
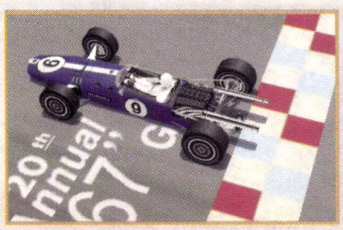
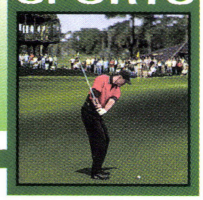








Tiger Woods 99

The kid's got it

By Daniel Morris

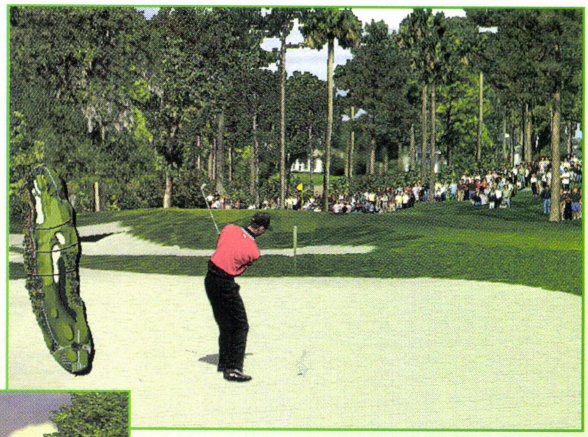
After a couple years of characters in PGA Tour Golf who looked just like Tiger but weren't, EA has finally landed the Holy Grail of sports endorsements—Tiger Woods. The license must've cost millions, but my money says EA isn't sweating that one bit.

Tiger Woods 99 PGA Tour Golf essentially just wraps the existing PGA Tour game architecture around the franchise's young new champion. This isn't really a bad thing, as EA's golf series has been pretty darn good for a couple of years now. It's maybe not quite in league with Links LS '98 or Jack Nicklaus 5, but it's right up there, and it's certainly more newbie-friendly than the competition.

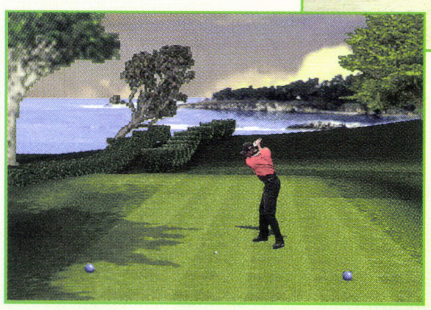
A host of new features continues that tradition. "Intelligent" shot-making allows you to set up safe shots and aggressive shots, depending on the amount of risk you want to take; and it lets you play conservatively or aggressively before you even start your swing. And of course there are the Tiger Tips, 17 video interludes where Tiger stops the action to give you a hint about how to play certain situations (downhill lies, deep sand, etc.). EA says the tips will help both your real game and your digital game, but we're never happy with video advice.

TW99 is backward-compatible with all of the prior PGA Tour courses, so with the addition of three exclusive courses on this disc, there are a total of 16 to play. TW99's additions are exclusive licenses for Pebble Beach and the TPC at Sawgrass, plus the TPC at Summerlin. The courses are beautifully rendered, and the 3D graphics are a notch better than when we last checked in on PGA Tour.

Once you've finished admiring the novelty of a polygonal Tiger Woods swinging digital golf clubs, there's still a lot to recommend the rest of "his" game. EA has gone to great lengths to make the title fast, heavily marketing the notion that you can play an 18-hole round in 30 minutes. They're right. You fly through a game of TW99.



Even the big man gets into sand trouble once in a while.



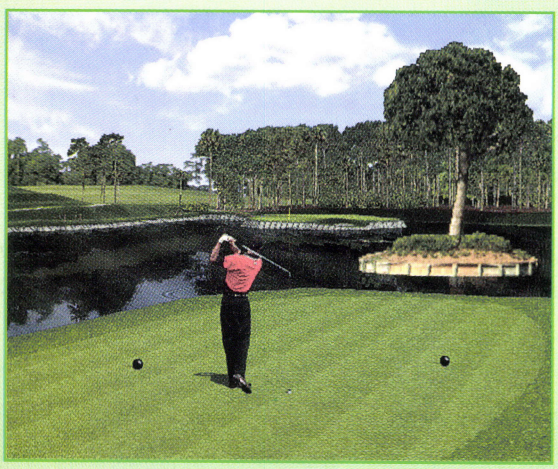
The setting sun of Pebble Beach makes for one of golf's most beautiful backdrops.

PGA Tour was always the easiest of the golf games to master—I was shooting par more or less out of the box—but TW99 makes you work a little harder. Shot-making takes a little more presence of mind because the analog swing mode forces you to adopt rhythm and timing into your cyberswing. (Three-click mode is still around for old-timers.)

EA's ball cams and landing cams really let the 3D engine strut its stuff. The fast, sweeping views offer some visually dynamic golf. The realistic gallery crowds and superb ambient sound and commentary provide a very nice atmosphere to the proceedings.

But TW99's biggest bonus is its multiplayer options. No game is easier to play online: a simple button-click for EA Sports Net connects you to a lounge where other players are setting up TW99 foursomes. You'll be playing, and smoothly, within minutes. There's very little lag and the chat utilities are excellent. Best of all is a $65,000 cash-prize tour EA's arranging at **www.easportstour.com.**

On pure merits, Tiger Woods 99 still isn't the golf game that Access offers. But its many user-pleasing features, accessibility, and overall strength—plus its very reasonable price tag—make EA's latest a very strong choice for digital golfers.



Tiger challenges the world-famous 17th at Sawgrass, the island hole.

TIGER WOODS 99

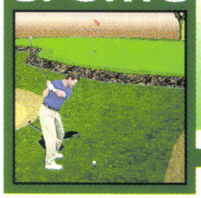
GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+ OVERALL

Strong multiplay and the PGA's golden boy make this a keeper.

PUBLISHER:	EA Sports 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.easports.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 32MB RAM, 100MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 64MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ To hit the Tiger Shot, overswing and then connect perfectly on the downstroke of the swing meter. If you see green on the last click of the screen, you've launched one. ▼ The Tiger Tips are available in Stroke Play or Practice modes.



Golden Tee Golf

Straight and simple

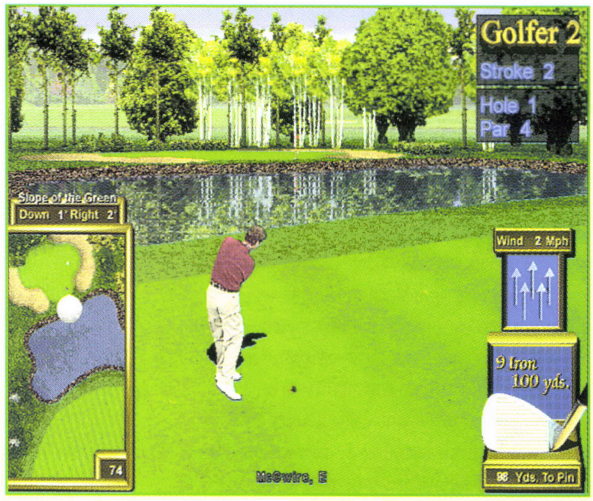
By Daniel Morris

If it's been a while since you've been down to the local arcade or sports bar, you don't know what you've been missing. Golden Tee Golf has been one of the most popular coin-ops of the last few years, and deservedly so. It's an addicting golf game that uses a trackball to simulate a real swinging motion.

Developer Incredible Technologies, already counting Golden Tee as a giant success at the coin-op level, is now showing some guts by wading into a very crowded PC pond. They're hoping that their title's proven street name and arcade-flavored gameplay will help separate it from the increasingly muddled pack.

The biggest hurdle is that there's no trackball like at the arcade. Golden Tee makes do with the TrackSwing, another coy trademark for the de rigueur mouseswing. When you first load the game, you take five calibration swings with your mouse, and then you're locked in. Time to play.

It's refreshing to see a golf title that doesn't pretend to be competing with Links LS '98 or Jack Nicklaus 5. Golden Tee, like its fine coin-op parent, is a fairly mindless game.

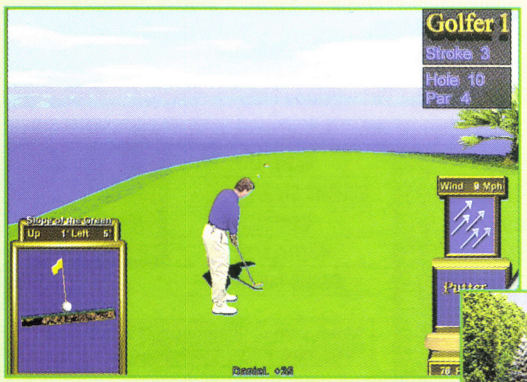


The three courses—pine forest, desert, and coastal—provide plenty of scenic backgrounds.

nice, smooth flow to every screen and shot, though the game suffers when it tries to do things the other golf titles do brilliantly already. For example, the overhead view of the hole and the inset close-up camera of the ball landing are both useless. But they certainly don't detract from the game's entertaining rhythm.

Of course, Golden Tee's biggest advantage—its arcade emphasis—is also its biggest weakness. The ball physics are dubious at best. Sometimes shots seem to pop straight up or skip along the ground when there's no discernible difference in the mouseswing motion you took. The ball has a tendency to take big, cartoonish hops off the fairway. Water hazards are a laughably common nuisance, and they end up being like the traditional bosses at the end of every coin-op game's level. As tough as the hazards are, putting is really easy. I was sinking 45-footers routinely after just a few minutes of play.

But so what? The fine multiplayer options (hotseat, LAN, or online via Golden Tee Net, a free Internet matching service accessed from within the game) make Golden Tee a ton of fun to play against other people. A very friendly and intuitive interface coupled with fast and simple gameplay make Golden Tee Golf a worthwhile addition to the shelves of PC golf fans who occasionally want a little dessert as opposed to the full meal that a Links LS '98 offers. Clever commentator voiceovers and elegant graphics add to the kick. It won't win any industry awards, but priced at just $29.95, it should attract a lot of gamers.



Putting is so easy that even long ones like this are almost guaranteed two-putts.

It's about fun. You step up to the ball and whack it; it goes straight or it doesn't. The challenge isn't so much about mastering "real" golf as it is mastering "Golden Tee" Golf, a somewhat looser and more flexible affair.

The PC version is, thankfully, not just an arcade port. The 3D graphics engine has been newly minted for the platform to better take advantage of detail and scenery. There's a

This sand-blast shows off some of the nicer graphical details, including the bunker rake and 150-yard sign.

GOLDEN TEE GOLF

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-

B- OVERALL

Fine arcade-style golf.

DEVELOPER:	Incredible Technologies
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.interplay.com
REQUIRES:	P90, 64MB HD, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS

▼ Learn to shape fades and draws with the TrackSwing guide, which lets you sculpt shots without having to alter your physical mouseswing. ▼ The pins change location, so be advised of that before you start a new round. ▼ Listen to Peter Jacobsen, the star golfer who will offer tips when you screw up.

Commandos

Death from the bushes

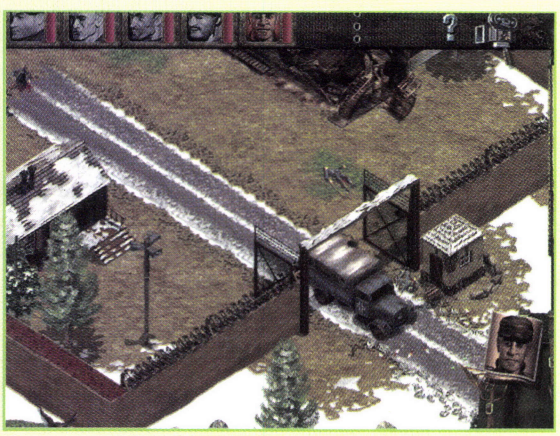
By Peter Olafson

For a game, Commandos sometimes seems a lot like work. Nevertheless, I've been punching the clock every day, coming in early and staying late.

This fascinating World War II special-forces game keeps you well employed as commander of up to six Allied troopers on 24 missions in angled-down German territory. They typically end in golden, debris-laden explosions—here, you're blowing up a dam or a chateau, there a radar station or a giant artillery piece—but the means in this real-time strategy game is all about stealth, timing, and teamwork.

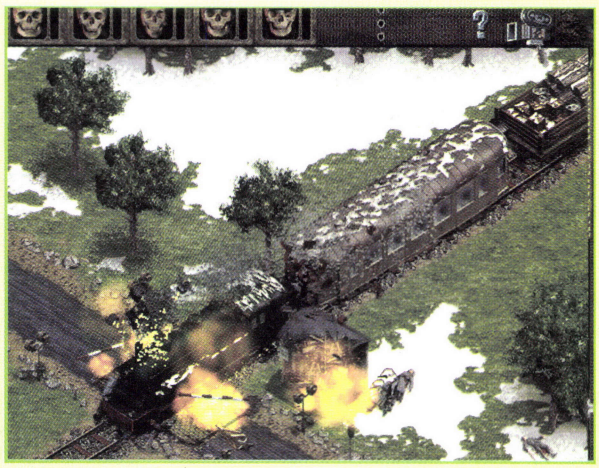
The commandos share the ability to walk, run, crawl, climb ladders, and fire their standard-issue .45s, and two or three also know their way around a first-aid kit.

Beyond that, each has unique skills. The Green Beret is good with a knife, knows how to use camouflage and climb walls, and can carry heavy objects (including dead Germans). The sniper snipes. The Marine is comfortable on and under water. The demolitions expert also knows how to lay traps and handle grenades. The spy can impersonate Germans and administer poison, and the driver can pilot enemy vehicles and is adept with a burp gun.



When you blow up this German fuel depot, make sure you don't destroy the truck, too. It's your ride home.

Using that gun may be risky. Hell, everything's risky in Commandos. Moving around without intimate knowledge of your surroundings, leaving behind footprints in the snow, or taking down a sentry all have the potential to attract attention. (Each enemy has a roving field of vision, represented by a transparent green overlay.) Avoiding detection is a delicate art—if even one commando dies, you'll have to restart the level or restore a save—and this makes the game at once repetitive and deliciously addictive.



One of society's most basic prohibitions: Don't drive on the train tracks.

The artwork helps (lots of rich browns and greens), and so does the AI. The enemy troops are both unexpectedly clever...and unexpectedly moronic. For instance, a few missions in, I sent two men—one with a bear trap, the other with an audible decoy—to ensnare the guards around a chateau targeted for destruction. Much to my surprise, I managed to nail five or six of them, using those items repeatedly in the same locations, before the Germans finally figured it out and opened fire on the decoy.

Moreover, the game doesn't have much sense of degree. The Germans always seem to spot your men when they're visible and within range, and their fire is resolutely on-target. The skills of the commandos are absolutes; the game draws no distinctions between different levels of competency. This makes sense with skills that require detailed technical knowledge—demolition, for instance—but seems silly for more general abilities like rowing a boat or throwing grenades.

And it was ultimately that rigidity—along with the significant level of personal control each commando requires (via either icons or hotkeys)—that had me feeling as though I'd signed up for a job saving and loading, saving and loading. More of a role-play approach, in which mundane tasks could be performed by any commando (but more efficiently by experts), would've been less frustrating.

The cooperative multiplayer game for two to six was enjoyable. Timing-critical aspects of the mission were easier to pull off, although the awkward multiplayer interface requires you to run Commandos' MS-DOS server program before entering a game. Multiplay's designed only for LAN play and Mplayer (which didn't have the game running at press time).

But the single-player game of Commandos is a regular hoot (hoot *quietly*, though). While I've lost patience with the saving and loading, I haven't stopped punching the clock. Don't wait up. I'm working late.

COMMANDOS

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

Maah-velous (if somewhat repetitive) WWII special-ops in real-time.

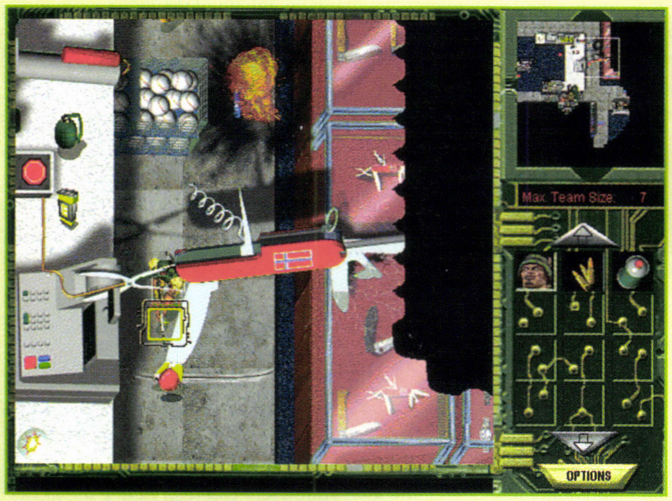
DEVELOPER:	Pyro Studios
PUBLISHER:	Eidos Interactive 800-617-8737
WEB:	www.eidosinteractive.com
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 70MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ It's tempting to call on the sniper to pick off your enemies in every tight spot. Resist the temptation; use him only at the most critical junctures, as his ammo is limited. ▼ Whenever feasible, use Tiny (the Green Beret) to lug bodies to a shielded location. Neatness counts.

Small Soldiers

Chip's neighborhood watch

By Peter Suciu



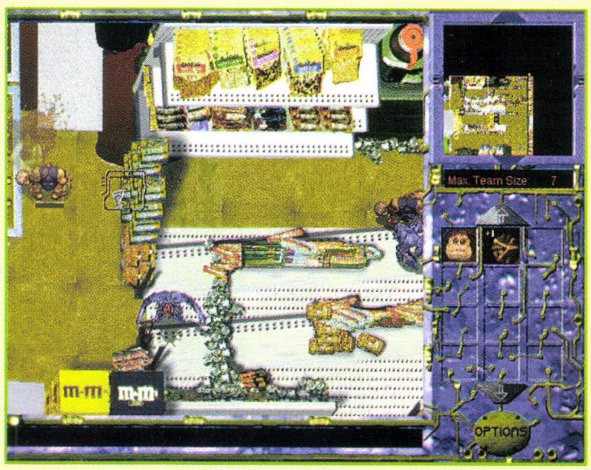
Never underestimate the power of a Swiss army knife.

Hot on the heels of the lackluster film, Major Chip Hazard and the gang from *Small Soldiers* have arrived to wage war on the PC. Like 3DO's Army Men, Small Soldiers: Squad Commander is a real-time, mission-based, tactical combat game where players control a small group of "toys" (in this case, action figures) to wage a very real and deadly war. Small Soldiers has gone beyond Army Men, placing these engagements in a battleground that resembles a once-peaceful neighborhood, including backyards, bedrooms, basements, and local shops.

You lead either the Commando Elite or the Gorgonites into a 20-mission battle for control of the neighborhood. While the movie presents the Commando Elite as villains with aggressive xenophobic attitudes, they actually seem to be more fun and challenging to play than their opponents. In the film, the passive and fairly peaceful Gorgonites became content with a "hide and lose" strategy. As the in-game enemy, they're a quick and tactical, worthy rival. But they seem all too like their movie counterparts when you're forced to rely on them as your soldiers.

The gameplay is similar to Army Men's. It's got an overhead view of the action, except players can command more than one character. Along the way, units can pick up extra goodies like firecrackers, Tinker Toys, and other gadgets that cause further damage and general mayhem. As the game progresses, players gain access to more characters and can command greater numbers of them. Since the characters are action figures, it's possible to have an entire team made up of Chips, but a mix of units is recommended (combined arms, anyone?), since some units can fire at range, while others inflict greater damage but require direct contact.

The individual missions demand that you solve relatively easy puzzles while engaging in a near-constant melee with opponents. Avoid traps like table saws and lawnmowers while successfully destroying enemy computers, flooding basements, and rescuing team members from the clutches of the vile foe. Damage can be repaired by obtaining new batteries (something that would never fix any real-world action figure), and you can improve a unit's offensive capabilities by nabbing power-ups.



Product placements at their best as the Commando Elite raids a neighborhood store.

The graphics and cut-scenes are more reminiscent of the film *Toy Story* (albeit a poor-man's version) than of *Small Soldiers*. While the individual units very closely resemble their big-screen personas, the game's setting doesn't have a particularly compelling or realistic look. You'll feel more like you're watching a bad Saturday-morning cartoon than action figures locked in a fight to the death.

The limited amount of dialogue from the characters—featuring Tommy Lee Jones as Chip—grates on your nerves after a while. Then again, the overly repeated one-liners make it that much more fun to turn these figures into a pile of scrap plastic!

Overall, Small Soldiers should keep the younger crowd happy for hours, but the lack of mission diversity and multiplay will turn off more seasoned vets. While Army Men appealed to anyone who grew up with toy soldiers, Small Soldiers is too current and cutesy to strike a chord with diehard gamers.

SMALL SOLDIERS

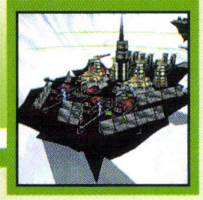
GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	B

B- OVERALL

Strategy for kids; G.I. Joe without the Kung-fu Grip.

DEVELOPER:	DreamWorks Interactive
PUBLISHER:	Hasbro Interactive 800-683-5847
WEB:	www.dreamworksgames.com
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 25MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS ▼ While firecrackers and cherry bombs are great offensive weapons, be sure some of your guys have other important items, like binoculars. ▼ Don't spread the forces too thin—the enemy might sneak up and attack uncommanded units while you're commanding others. Uncommanded units might as well tear out their own batteries! ▼ Attack at range units that require close combat and use those firecrackers to inflict more damage. ▼ Shoot TNT containers when you spot them. They may make a good trap and cause massive damage to attacking units, but that trap can work both ways!



Stratosphere

Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee

By Allen Rausch

Stratosphere: Conquest of the Skies isn't great, but it's an engaging action/strategy title that bears some resemblance to Activision's underappreciated NetStorm. You start with a magical floating island of rock and choose from among 60 structures—including weapons, energy producers, propulsion units, defenses, and special TechnoMagic units—to build onto your flying fortress. Then you fly around and go into combat against other islands.

The strategy, of course, is in the building and placement of these units. Each player's plot of land consists of only so many hexagons (til you find more land to add), and each system available takes up a certain number of those hexagons. This gives the game an element of Tetris-like shape manipulation. For instance, if you add one more (two-hexagon) turning jet or a (one-hexagon) battery pack, you may have just covered up the piece of land you needed to install the newest electro-cannon.

An Archer emerges from a Jumpgate to pound the renegades.

Since you can build and move objects during combat, the net effect is of playing SimCity while under artillery barrage. Will you build a fast, maneuverable little raider, or a slow-moving, weapons-laden juggernaut?

While Stratosphere is host to these and many other good gameplay ideas, the final implementation ranges from excellent to oddly unfinished. For example, the 24 single-player missions (there are also 12 quick-start missions) are well-designed, difficult, and fun to play, but the storyline is poorly presented, amateurish, and illustrated with comic-book–style images and FMVs that are so bad, they're laughable. Graphically, the units on your island are quite distinctive and attractive, but the river valleys and mountains you fly through in Stratosphere's seven lands are so poorly drawn and rendered that it takes a 3D accelerator to bring them up to a passable level.

The game interface is similarly schizophrenic. Much of it is quite good, allowing players to manage the building, maintenance, and repair of forts with ease. The Unit Library gives a complete breakdown—including cost, appearance, and function—of each structure. Vital status-reports on events during a mission, however, are announced only by a voiceover saying "Incoming message." Since Kodiak had a voice actor saying that line, would it have been so hard to record the rest of the game's dialogue as well, rather than forcing the gamer to read it on a tiny little screen during combat?

Although the single-player game can be fun, Stratosphere's real attraction is battling up to three other players on the Internet and crashing into each other like castle-sized bumper cars. There are 12 specific multiplayer maps, and multiplayer variations include deathmatch ("dog eat dog"), ground strikes, and escort missions. While Internet play seemed to run smoothly, I did experience the occasional lockup in single-play while working in the fortress construction area—so save your work often.

A Hurricane fortress overwhelms a loyalist Nimbus.

Chase your enemies through seven worlds.

All things considered, I must admit that Stratosphere captivated me. It's just a whole lot of fun to build these enormous structures and fly them around, and the weapons and structures you can trick your fortress out with have a definite, measurable impact on gameplay. Despite Stratosphere's flaws, it still manages to charm.

STRATOSPHERE

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	D-
3D ACCELERATED:	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C

B
OVERALL

Engaging yet sometimes erratic.

DEVELOPER:	Kodiak
PUBLISHER:	Ripcord Games 888-797-5867
WEB:	www.ripcordgames.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166 w/3D card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Protect your thrusters. The quickest way to get killed is to lose the ability to move. ▼ Don't hog resources. If you're assigned to protect another fortress in a single-player mission, allowing it to collect some resources will let it repair itself. ▼ Never be afraid to run away. The way to take down a much more powerful foe is to do damage, steal their resources, then retreat to heal. Eventually they'll run out of resources with which to repair themselves.

People's General

Once again, the people have spoken

By Marc Dultz

People's General follows the tradition of the wildly popular Panzer General series and treads on a potentially volatile subject—portraying a near-term conflagration in the Far East in the wake of a worldwide economic collapse. Supposedly, the People's Republic of China has decided to seek a military confrontation with Russia and the western allies sometime in the not-too-distant future, initiating a regional conflict as a means of resolving crises at home. With Siberia's vast supply of natural resources nearby and population growth showing no signs of abating, the Chinese have attacked the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and sparked the Third World War.

What makes People's General so compelling is the way it marries the Panzer General system with the latest advances in military science. Many of today's ground and airborne weapons platforms are ably modeled in the game, not to mention several advanced combat systems—such as stealth tanks and M2A4 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles—that have yet to see service. Moreover, the overall system has been modified to better reflect the concept of air support, combat task-forces, vertical envelopment, and combined arms operations. You can now tailor your air power, spending more prestige points at the start of a scenario to guarantee air supremacy—which will let you carry out a variety of air missions, from air transport to close air support to Wild Weasel (SAM-site killer) missions to reconnaissance.

Attack helicopters are especially good at tank busting and SCUD hunting, while transport choppers can insert troops behind enemy lines.

Furthermore, you can purchase up to two attachments for each new unit. They raise the cost of the unit but let it perform certain functions—such as air defense or fording rivers—without having to rely so much upon other units. Even the way replacements are handled has been changed. Now units can get them during their turn without having to pay anything in the way of prestige points. However, each time a unit takes replacements, its overall strength is reduced to the point where it can no longer function cohesively.

Add up to two attachments to the core unit to enhance its capabilities.

People's General also introduces historical wargamers to the concept of trigger hexes, which gives the leader an award or grants prestige, air mission, or experience points. Although trigger hexes are more common in games such as Fantasy General and Heroes of Might and Magic, the designers did an excellent job of implementing the system—it's another clever touch that holds up well during play.

There are several dozen standalone scenarios and nine campaigns portraying Communist China's expansion across the Far East Asian theater of operations and the western allies' (including Russia's) inevitable military response. While the longer campaigns can run for over 18 scenarios—depending upon how well you've fared—some of the shorter campaigns are only six scenarios long and can be played through in a single afternoon.

The game also has several well-balanced scenarios designed especially for multiplayer use via email, LAN, TCP/IP, or Mplayer.

People's General is not only an utterly satisfying and thoroughly enjoyable "beer and pretzels" game, but also one of those rare breeds where you can play for hours and never feel as if you've truly developed the ultimate winning strategy. Rely on a tank-heavy strategy, and your opponent's air power will reduce your forces to ashen heaps. Purchase only the most sophisticated weaponry, and swarms of low-tech enemy units easily engulf and annihilate your forces. While it's still very puzzle-like in nature, requiring you to achieve objectives within a limited time period, it's nevertheless one of the most entertaining wargames ever.

PEOPLE'S GENERAL

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A-

A- OVERALL

Rewarding and deeply satisfying WWIII sim.

DEVELOPER:	SSI Special Products Group
PUBLISHER:	SSI, Mindscape 800-866-5967
WEB:	www.SSIonline.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 32MB RAM, 50MB HD, 8x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 64MB RAM, 175MB HD, 16x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Use reconnaissance units to either uncover the enemy's positions or as a means of screening your own units. If a recon unit uncovers a heavy concentration of enemy armor, it should be immediately withdrawn behind your own front lines to safeguard them against an enemy attack. ▼ On the attack, use your Combat Support Units (CSUs) to maintain the drive's momentum. As the CSUs creep toward the enemy's lines, you can build and deploy fresh units around these units, then dispatch them to support the attack.

Sentinel Returns

A classic mistake

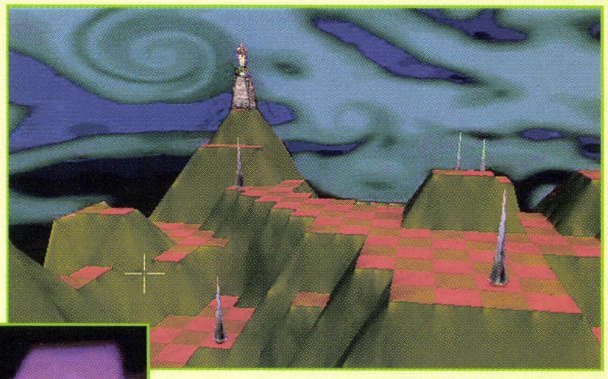
By Daniel Morris

One of the greatest pleasures of the old Amiga and Commodore 64 systems was a bizarre little game called Sentinel. Most of the titles of its day were simple arcade games, but Sentinel came out of left field to deliver an inventive and stressful gameplay experience.

Primitive graphics and sound notwithstanding, the elegant Sentinel offered the addictive challenge of making your way to the top of a chessboard landscape, evading the rotating gaze of the robotic Sentinel that stood watch at the highest peak of the terrain. The object was to absorb the energy of trees and spend it judiciously to create boulders and robot shells that helped you make your way to the Sentinel's position, where you finally had to absorb the menacing Sentinel itself and advance to the next level. There were 10,000 levels in all, and it was a uniquely challenging task to see your way to the end—what with that Sentinel sucking the juice out of you if its gaze ever found you, forcing you to seek a frenzied escape in what felt like the grip of a slow-motion tractor beam.

It was great, simple fun. But Sentinel Returns? What is there to return to? I mean, in all honesty, there wasn't much to the original. (If you're reading this, Geoff Crammond, I mean that in the best possible way. You designed a great game, and part of what made it so great was that there was almost nothing to it.)

But Psygnosis tapped British developer Hookstone to bring Sentinel into the modern 3D era. The idea, I suppose, was to infuse the classic gameplay with a graphically rich modern sensibility. The unimaginative chessboards of Sentinel have been overhauled, and now the game takes place in big, forbidding, cavernous landscapes to the paranoid strains of a John Carpenter (*Halloween*) soundtrack.



Tweak the sky a little bit, change some colors around—presto, a new level.

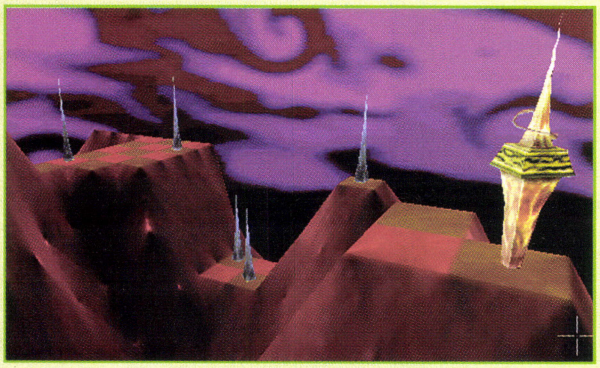
It's a much tougher attack when there are two scanning beams looking for you.

But Sentinel Returns is no more involving than the original, which worked so well because it was a product of more primitive times. Playing Sentinel Returns is a lot like playing Computer Battleship—mostly you're just thinking about how much fun it would be to crack open an old Battleship set and plug the little red pegs into the little gray plastic ships.

For those totally unfamiliar with Sentinel, the sequel is basically just Capture the Flag, but the flag is actively trying to spot and destroy you. Taking out the rotating Sentinel requires stacking boulders to gain height on the landscape, building robot shells to occupy, and then moving to a higher position—until you're finally in a position to conquer the Sentinel.

That's all there is to it. Psygnosis has added a four-way multiplayer option that lets you scramble to take the Sentinel first; players have the ability to warp opponents back down to a lower height if they catch them vulnerable. But who cares? It may be the most uninteresting multiplayer match yet devised for the PC, and it smacks of a marketing decision. ("It's gotta have multiplay, people!")

There's nothing to sustain interest in this game after even five or six levels, much less the 600 that are required to beat it. Sentinel should've remained a fond memory from a time when elegant simplicity could elevate a game beyond the constraints of limited technology. We have the technology now. Let's make some new games with it.



The game may be more graphics-intensive, but the square-based movement tells you it's still the same chessboard of the original.

SENTINEL RETURNS

GAMEPLAY:	D+
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	F
SOUND CHECK:	C+

D OVERALL

Nostalgia isn't enough to warrant this pointless facelift.

DEVELOPER:	Hookstone
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794
WEB:	www.psygnosis.com
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 45MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Screwing up your opponents in multiplay is easier than falling off a wet log. If you see them, click on them. It's as simple as that. They'll be transported to a lower point on the landscape. ▼ If you get set back, remember that you can absorb energy from your old abandoned robot shells and from the boulders you used to gain height.

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3D Ultra Pinball: The Lost Continent 5137302
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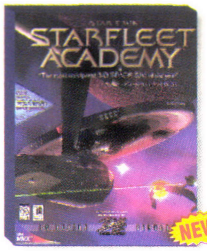

Star Trek Starfleet Academy
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Home/Personal, P

Oregon Trail 3rd Edition 5139001
Children's Education, Pent90, 16mb

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Children's Education, WC

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Sports, Pentium, 16mb

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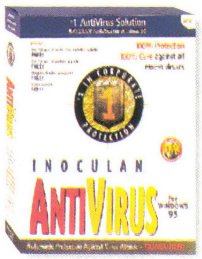

Inoculan Antivirus
5141205
Home/Personal

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Adventure, Pent90, 16mb

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NEW **NHRA Drag Racing** 5162508
Driving Sim., Pentium, 16mb

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Flight Sim., Pent133, 16mb, J

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Sports, WC, Pentium, 16mb

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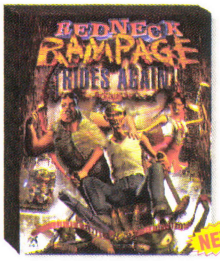
Strategy Game, Pent100, 16mb



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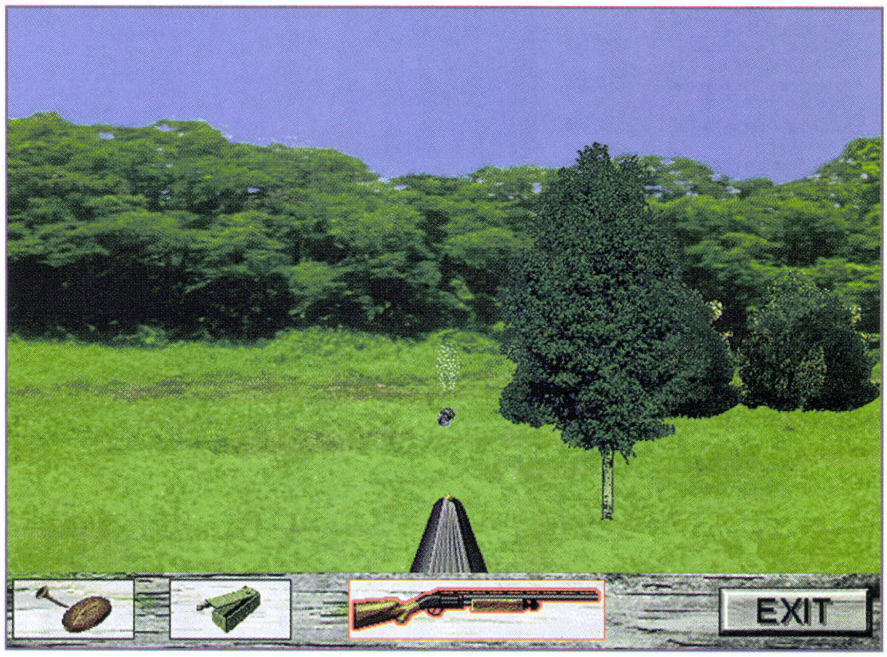
Hunting Big Game

By Don St. John

Here's what's out there now for the dedicated tracker of elk, duck, and whitetail—plus a look at the better shooting on the horizon

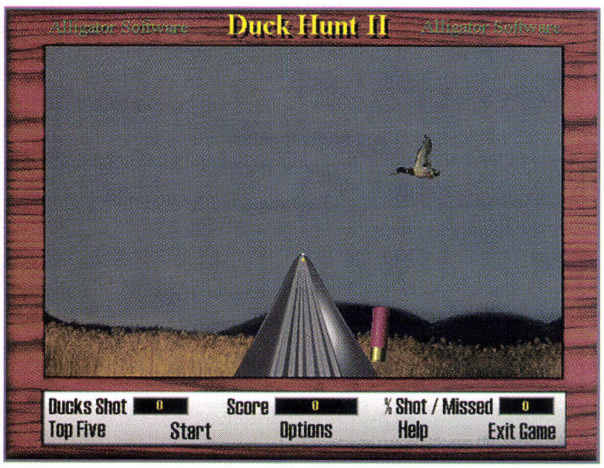
Bambi is running scared. Time was when the only computer-game animals that really had to worry were the Rottweilers in Quake. But no more: There's no question that this year's most popular—and surprising—genre is hunting games, spurred by the out-of-nowhere success of WizardWorks' Deer Hunter. The latest sales charts tracked by industry watcher PC Data show that the trend's no fluke, either: Out of the 10 top-selling games for the first half of 1998, three—Deer Hunter (No. 1), Cabela's Big Game Hunter (No. 8), and Wild Turkey Hunt (No. 9)—were hunting games. Yep, Deer Hunter outsold *everything*, including Starcraft, Myst, Riven, and Quake II.

What accounts for the startling success of the load-and-fire genre? Well, it's hard to argue with the $20 price WizardWorks—GT Interactive's value-priced product arm—set for Deer Hunter. (Hint to game publishers: People *like* paying less than $50 for games.) Most of the other titles in the genre have been priced similarly, but the sales of the other games reveals a bigger truth: There's a huge audience for hunting, which, after all, is one of America's most popular leisure activities.



See that pixel blob? That's the turkey in Wild Turkey Hunt.

Naturally, there's been a rush into the genre, with several games based on various hunting activities on the shelves already. Perhaps more exciting, though, is the next generation of hunting titles, which aims to bring better production values, attention to detail, realism, and 3D environments (i.e., Z-axis movement, not acceleration) to a type of game often derided for being a cheap, quick knockoff.



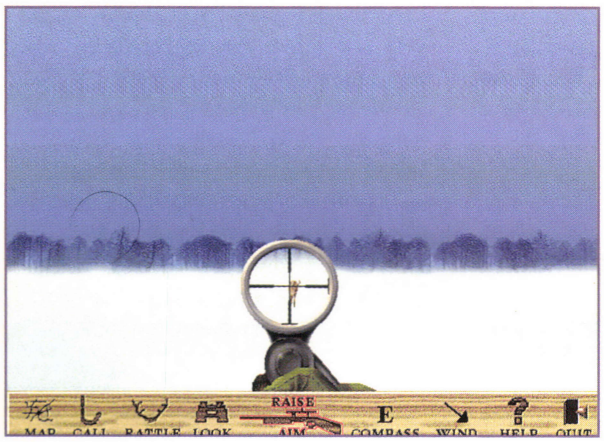
Ducks fly back and forth, over and over, in Sportsman's Paradise's Duck Hunt II module.

Which is what's out there now. Remember, Deer Hunter was a value-line game that was made for relative peanuts. It shows: The basic qualities that gamers expect from almost any 1998 title are lacking in these games. Movement? No go. You sit in one spot to fire, using a cumbersome map view to find new locations. Graphics? Hah! Try photorealistic backgrounds with 2D trees stuck on 'em and the occasional sprite-based animal. Action? Not enough. These games are geared toward people who are used to wandering the woods for days at a time without ever finding anything to shoot at. Check out our assessment of the current rack of games, read about what's coming up, and remember that patience and a steady aim are virtues.

On the Shelves

Sportsman's Paradise

Strictly for absolute beginners, whether with hunting games or gaming in general. This compilation is even older than Deer Hunter and serves up six games (including a fishing tournament) with kiddie graphics and pop-up animals of the sort you see at a carnival booth. Given its age, it's really unfair to judge it as one of the current crop of games, so we won't. But be aware: Even the value-level quality of the current era of



Winter hunting in Deer Hunter's Extended Season.

games has moved beyond the choices in Sportsman's Paradise. (WizardWorks; 800-229-2744; www.wizardworks.com; $20) **(No Grade)**

Deer Hunter's Extended Season and Wild Turkey Hunt

Deer Hunter was the one that opened the floodgates. (We gave it a D in our May/June 1998 issue, but hundreds of thousands of you didn't agree or care.) It opened the floodgates for WizardWorks, too, as they've come out with several hunting titles since. First up was Deer Hunter Companion with five new levels; following that were Deer Hunter's Extended Season (three new areas and bigger bucks) and Wild Turkey Hunt.

Really, the lack of action in the games based on the Deer Hunter engine is what's led to them being so beaten up by reviewers. With good reason: The sit-and-spin interface is both incredibly frustrating and not recommended for people prone to motion sickness. All you can do is set up in one spot, spin around, and hope that you'll get a spot of motion to shoot at. By the time an animal shows up, you're so anxious to do something— anything—that you blast away. Likely as not you miss (aiming is purely a guessing game), and then it's another dull stretch.

Getting around is a huge hassle. You move from spot to spot inside an overhead map view meant to represent 49 square miles. A right-hand window pops up a scene when you hit an area likely to have animals, but can you stop your Point A to B march? Nope. You have to backtrack and then play hit-and-miss until you locate the spot again. Not many other games build in frustration so uncannily.

If you have Deer Hunter and liked it for some reason, then hey, it's your money. We'd say take a pass on both of these, otherwise. (WizardWorks; DHES, $10; WTH, $20) **GRADE: Guess what? D!**

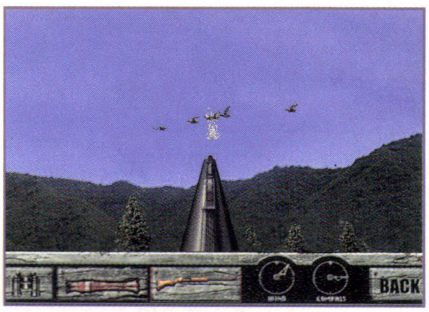
Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter and Bird Hunter: Waterfowl Edition

These more recent WizardWorks titles still use the Deer Hunter engine for gameplay, but they add more choices for the hunter. Think of them as developer Sunstorm Interactive's first application of the lessons learned from Deer Hunter feedback.

Basically, the range of tools available to you is expanded. There are more calls and scents, decoys for bird hunting, and a few more weapons. (For a good laugh, try the Rocky Mountain rocket launcher cheat in this month's Cheats section.) You also get such aids as binoculars, a spotting scope meant to help you spot animals in the map view once you've ID'd a likely animal habitat, and (in Rocky Mountain) bear bait. All these give you a somewhat better handle on the gameplay conditions.

Still, once you're on the hunt, you've got the same interface as Deer Hunter. And

A near-miss and a quick reload in Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter.



This shotgun spread might catch a goose in Bird Hunter.

blasting away at tiny ducks or waiting for some elk to show its face...well, we're talking paint drying here. (WizardWorks; $20 each) **GRADE: C-**

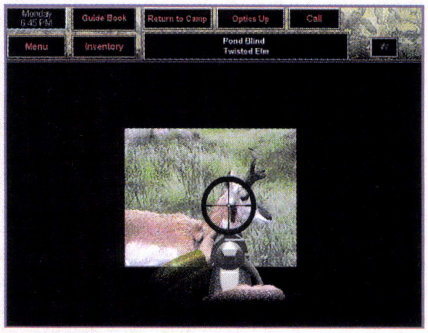
Sporting Clays

This isn't actually a hunting game, which is its saving grace in some ways. You're not pinned in one place, waiting for elk or wild turkey, so you actually get a sense of action from Sporting Clays.

Sporting Clays lets you blast away with impunity.

It's also WizardWorks' most realistic game, with a number of factors that mirror the trapshooting experience. You can adjust gun sensitivity and choose your choke pattern (which, here, adjusts the size of the clays). The shooting method is also quite close to tournament shooting—right-click to "call your clay," right-click to raise and aim your gun, and left-click to shoot. All that's missing is the kick of the gun against your shoulder.

Graphical quality is at the same basic level as the Deer Hunter games, but you don't need fabulous graphics for trapshooting. And simply not having to sit around waiting for something to happen elevates this over all the other WizardWorks hunting games. If you don't need your target to bleed, spend your $20 on this one. (WizardWorks; $20) **GRADE: B-**



This deer looks like dead meat, but don't be too sure. (Cabela's)

Cabela's Big Game Hunter

Of all the hunting titles currently available, Cabela's Big Game Hunter may be the most attractive. That's kind of damning it with faint praise, as this is yet another game with annoying deficiencies and 1994-level development values. But it's the first to take a good shot at replicating the hunting experience in any realistic way, so it gets points for that.

For those of you who aren't woodsmen (or women), Cabela is one of the country's largest outfitting companies, carrying every bit of hunting gear imaginable. And there's no way around getting the Cabela experience in your face: The beginning of Big Game Hunter forces you to go through some of the Cabela catalog to get ready to play. If you hate product placements in games, be warned that this is one of the more egregious examples of late. You'll also have to buy tags, talk to some annoying old codgers in the hunting lodge, and go to the target range to calibrate your gun. No rush for blood here.

However, the outfitting serves some purpose, as Big Game Hunter is a timed experience that has you out in the field in all sorts of conditions.

Although the interface is once again sit-and-spin, the terrain is more realistic, the choice of weaponry much more sophisticated (you need to choose well for the prey you're hunting), and the conditions really matter. However, when you go to shoot, the animation kicks you into a video sequence that limits your ability to get off an accurate shot. Really, this sort of stuff went away three years ago. But if you can't wait, Big Game Hunter is your best choice right now. (Head Games; 612-321-9470; www.headgames.net; $25) **GRADE: C**

Redneck Deer Huntin'

Interplay's entry into the genre is crossbred with a natural audience segment— those who thought the hick quality of Redneck Rampage was a hoot. Redneck Deer Huntin' features Leonard, one of the "heroes" of Rampage, as well as the same venerable Build engine. (The DOS install brings back some fond memories.)

Although the Build environment isn't the speediest around anymore, that's not a drawback here—running is usually going to spook your prey over the hill and far away. And RDH does have a 3D environment, a first for these games. But the graphics are hardly state of the art, and the environments lack any imagination whatsoever: they're just flat terrain with a smattering of color or snow. You'll do a lot of rambling before finding much to shoot at, too.

Although Redneck Deer Huntin' touts itself as a "realistic hunting experience," that ain't quite so. Weapons are limited to a 30-06 rifle (with or without scope), a 12-gauge shotgun, a .44 Magnum for boar hunting, and a crossbow. Physics aren't especially real, and the wind only serves as a scent carrier. The boar is a challenge; not much else really is. Better to fight aliens in Redneck Rampage than vague deer here. (Interplay; 800-468-3775; www.interplay.com; $20) **GRADE: C**

Trophy Whitetail is one of the first hunting games to offer 3D.

3D Hunting: Trophy Whitetail

This game is the bridge between the first-generation hunting titles and the upcoming ones. Trophy Whitetail isn't quite true-3D—you can tell from the pixelation that there's a lot of 2D foliage, for instance—but it does let you hunt through a 3D-modeled environment with real topography.

That said, there's not a lot of attention to serious detail. Physics don't seem to matter here—the wind is just for scent purposes and doesn't affect shooting at all. I dropped a buck from a distance that should have been out of range, which also means that authentic hit regions aren't included either. Weapon choices are basic, and the graphics are, once again, frustratingly lame. It may be 3D, but Trophy Whitetail

Believe it or not, that really *is* a Redneck Deer Huntin' animal in your scope.

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isn't the game you want to spend all your money on. (Macmillan Digital; 317-581-3833; www.macmillansoftware.com/games/; $25) **GRADE: C**

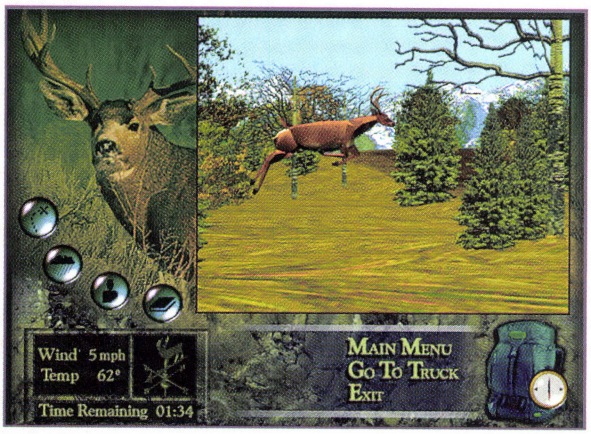
What's Coming

Let's face it: The quality of hunting titles so far, by hardcore gamer standards, hasn't been too hot. That should change very soon, with a vastly improved second generation of hunting titles about to hit the shelves and bring the stalk into the world of 3D.

Central to all the new releases, according to their producers, is one thing: Treating hunting as a full-fledged sport. "We definitely look at this as a sport, not a game," says Mike Jacob, producer of Sierra On-Line's Trophy Buck. "To us, it's the same thing we've tried to do with Trophy Bass in terms of realism and detail."

"We're taking the time to get this to look the way it really looks," says Travis Williams, executive producer of TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter, ASC Games' foray into the hunting genre. "When you hit a deer with a kill shot, it's going to go down like it's really been shot."

Where are the Skaarj? ASC Games' TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter will give gamers deer huntin' with the Unreal engine.



The producers of Trophy Buck aim to give it the same kind of realism as Sierra's Trophy Bass series.

Trophy Buck and TNN Outdoors Pro Hunter, due this month, are two entries into the world of more ambitious and realistic hunting titles. They'll have stiff competition from the leaders of the herd. Head Games, recently acquired by Activision, is poised to unleash Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2 and Upland Game Hunter in November, and Ducks Unlimited: Duck Hunter Pro 3D is available now. And WizardWorks' Deer Hunter 2, which brings the top-selling franchise up to 3D level, should be on shelves when you read this.

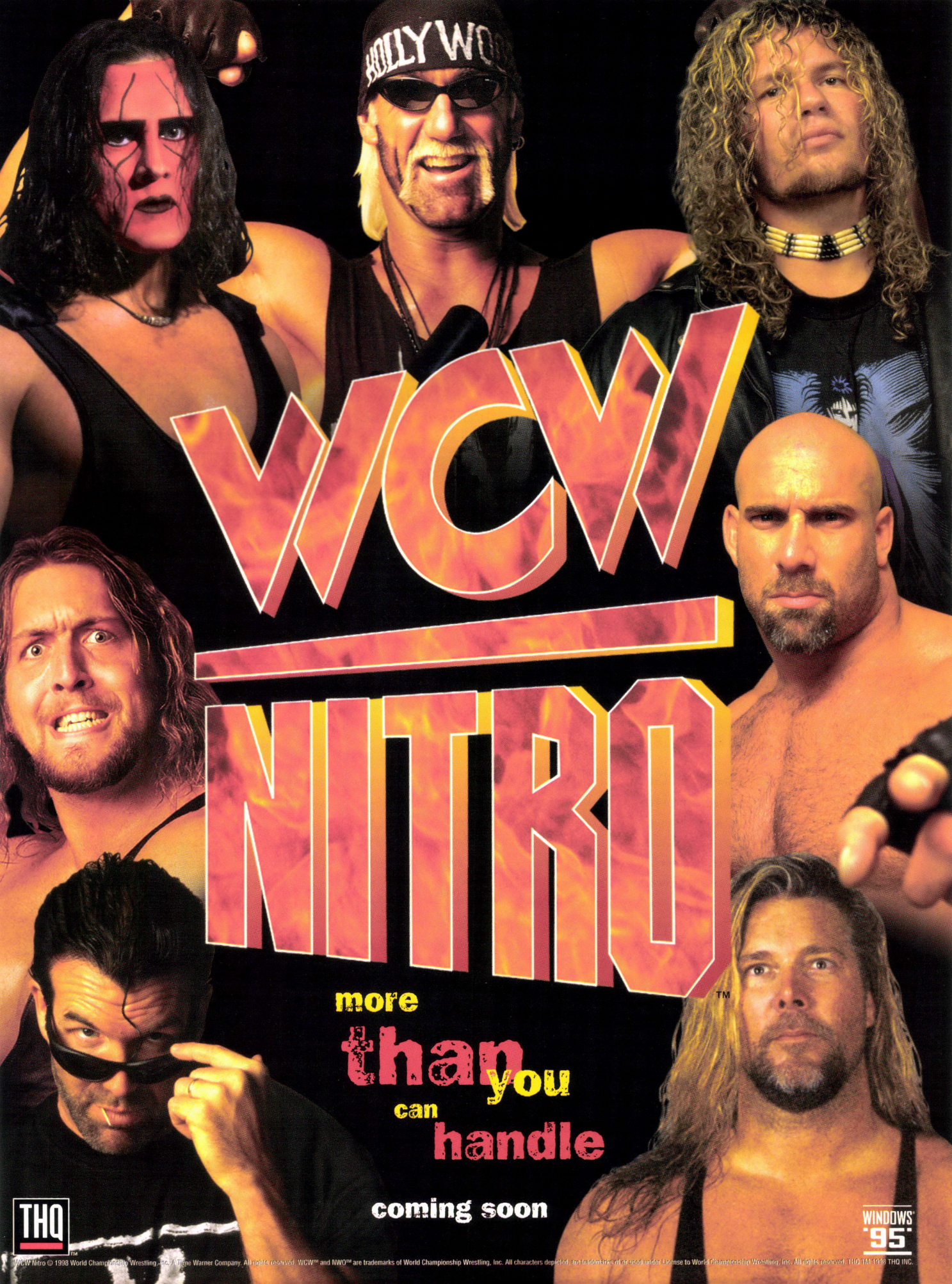
"We want to see people's faces when they see this for the first time," says Chris Boxmeyer, WizardWorks' producer for DH2. "It'll be like the difference between Doom and Quake II."

What are the new games going to offer that you haven't seen?

- The aforementioned 3D. You'll get to move through environments in a way that no prior game besides Redneck Deer Huntin' allowed. Most of the games will be optimized for 3D hardware acceleration, too, and levels will feature varied terrain, animal modeling, and AI that more closely resemble the real thing. The TNN title will take this to a hardcore gamer's extreme: it's using the Unreal engine.
- Greatly improved physics. Wind and distance will take bullets and arrows offline. In DH2, trees will stop bullets. Weather will affect movement conditions for both animals and hunters. And there'll be hit regions: Now, if you don't hit your prey in a vulnerable spot, they'll take off, forcing you to track a blood trail.
- Ambient sound that means something. Sure, the existing games all have ambient sound, but it doesn't do anything to help you; spin in a circle and your elk sound won't move. The newer games will shoot for 3D positional sound: if you hear something, you'll have a better sense of its actual location.
- Expanded, fully modeled locations. You'll hunt in spots based on real-world locations, with real topography and foliage. The environments will be active, too: Step on a twig (as Redneck Deer Huntin' features now), and it'll snap. Bye-bye, prey.
- Serious weapon choices, including rifles, shotguns, and muzzleloaders based on real-world performance, and bows with varied characteristics. "Hunters are particular about what they use, and we'll give them realistic choices," Jacob says. "That includes bow hunters—they'll have longbows and compound and recurve bows available." Ted Nugent would approve.

One thing that will change little is the price for your journeys into the deer-filled backwoods. Everything we mentioned is expected to be $20, with the exception of Sierra's $30 Trophy Buck.

It's likely that hunting aficionados *and* gamers will approve of the bargain-priced 3D-based titles. But give the first batch of games their proper due: They may have been lame as games, but they opened up gaming to an eager audience that clearly wasn't being served by the world of dungeons, race tracks, and flight sims. Now maybe those folks will find out how beautiful and immersive games can really be.



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Creatures 2

What ever happened to Baby Jane?

Creatures 2 provides DNA-encoded eggs, environment, and communication tools with which to raise creatures called Norns. Keep the first generation alive long enough to breed, and you can experiment with the genes of their progeny. But don't hold your breath.

Zack grieves as Houdini floats to heaven.

This sequel to the surprise hit Creatures features a larger, more complex ecosystem (including many new life-forms, weather, and flowing water); applets that allow you to monitor details such as biochemistry, environment, and neurology; and Norns with organs, better brain structure, and more genes.

CyberLife did heed complaints and improved the interface. Your hand cursor—how Norns recognize you—now triggers object names when you touch them so you know what words to teach. And while you still can't pick Norns up, you can now push them.

But C2 does have tics. For instance, the View screen—meant to show what a Norn's looking at (a crucial teaching tool)—often shows something looked at seconds before, which results in ridiculous misnomers (it'll call you "fruit" instead of "Daddy," for example). And it's *hell* to unteach a Norn.

The real capper: All my Norns (7, 8, 9? I lost count) developed an inability to eat as they approached adolescence. Just when I thought they were fending for themselves, they'd start complaining—surrounded by foodstuffs—that they were starving. Sometimes they'd grab food and run with it, still refusing to eat. Eventually they'd keel over.

Why? Because Norns are missing something crucial to all real life-forms: instincts. Put a nipple in front of a hungry baby and it *will* eat.

I *like* Creatures 2—or I wanted to. But I don't have the heart or the time to kill any more Norns. —*Karen Eng*

CREATURES 2

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	A

B- OVERALL

***Gremlins* meets *Mommie Dearest*. Fantastic concept, tortured execution.**

DEVELOPER:	CyberLife
PUBLISHER:	Mindscape 800-283-8499
WEB:	www.creatures2.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 300MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

Get Medieval

Gauntlet for the '90s

If imitation's the grandest form of flattery, Monolith must be suffering from hero worship. Get Medieval, Monolith's second release, is a blatant clone of Atari's classic multiplayer actionfest Gauntlet. For fans of both retro gaming and fantasy action, there's plenty to like here.

Like Gauntlet, GM is a dungeon-crawl shooter where you and up to three others pick from four characters (male and female) and lead them through a monster-infested, treasure-laden evil stronghold. You view the action from overhead, and the game's sharp 16-bit graphics bring the otherwise simplistic game into the '90s. Some nicely evocative lighting and transparency effects enhance the torches and magic, and the variety of monsters (more than 20) throughout the 40 levels is impressive. Admittedly, the nearly endless horde of them seems to use no-brainer AI routines, often ending up looking like a chorus line of freaks when they try to follow you from behind a wall. GM also has a handy random level generator, and Monolith's announced it's releasing a level editor on its Web site.

Panic? For what?

Impressive sound effects include the deep clanking of metal and wet splats of monsters exploding, and the soundtrack dramatically suits the carnage. But most notable are your characters' humorous one-liners, which give the game a *Mystery Science Theater 3000*–in–fantasy-drag appeal. It lends a party feel, which matches the cooperative multiplay perfectly. And this really is a multiplayer game: Playing alone tends to get redundant and boring after a while, but GM allows players to mix and match Net and same-machine players to great effect, and Internet play works nicely.

Get Medieval's main strength is its addictively fun cooperative gameplay. This is an homage done right. —*Jason D'Aprile*

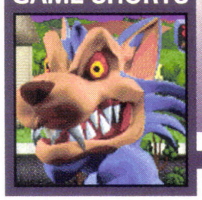
GET MEDIEVAL

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B OVERALL

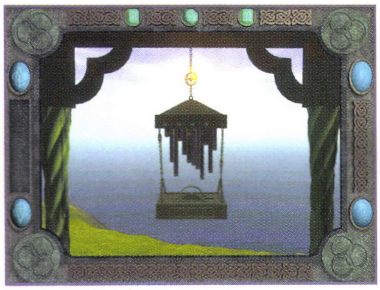
If you liked Gauntlet's classic gameplay, you'll have a ball.

PUBLISHER:	Monolith Productions 800-241-4263
WEB:	www.lith.com
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM, 100MB HD 6x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40



Celtica

Myst me not



Celtica promises a sojourn on a small isle off the western coast of Ireland that's steeped in the requisite elements of New Age lore. But when all's said and done, the most haunting thing about it is the feeling that you've seen and done it all before.

Celtica recalls Myst, down to how clicking in a given direction jumps you from one pretty, 24-bit SVGA static image to another.

At least the puzzles aren't Myst-like. Rather than being based on object manipulation of machines or the natural environment, Celtica's 20-odd puzzles are mostly brainteasers in the 7th Guest tradition: move prisms, select words on interlocking wheels, rearrange wind chimes, and such. A few depend on logic, but most require nothing more ingenious than a detailed scan of various books and scrolls.

While competent, Celtica is years behind the times. Skip it and watch for further titles in the Hero's Quest and Gabriel Knight series. *—Barry Brenesal*

PUBLISHER: H+A 416-977-6732
WEB: www.h-plus-a.com
STREET PRICE: $20

C- OVERALL

Rampage

Romp and stomp

Godzilla? Mothra? King Kong? They've got nothing on these guys. As every old-time arcade joe knows, Rampage rocks.

This sidescrolling action port is sheer smash-'em-up fun. Playing Lizzy, George, or Ralph (a giant lizard, ape, or werewolf), you

cruise each of the 130-plus city-levels, doing what any B-movie monster would do: Wrecking buildings. Looting 'em for food and goodies. Eating people. Fighting helicopters, planes, and tanks. Generally dealing the most property damage and death possible within the time limit. You'd be surprised what fists, feet, and "hot loogies" can do to your average town.

As in the coin-op, multiplay is wildly entertaining, with up to three players (hotseat or via LAN) competing for who can destroy the most.

Rampage's sounds and graphics are solid, though the game looks and plays better in a less-than-full-screen format. Keyboard play's a bit awkward, but with a gamepad, it's humongously fun. Time to go break stuff. *—Corey Cohen*

PUBLISHER: Midway
WEB: www.midway.com
STREET PRICE: $50

B+ OVERALL

Castrol Honda Superbike

Skid-marked sim

The Castrol Honda Superbike team has joined forces with Intense Entertainment to put you behind the handlebars of the 1997 Superbike Champion Honda RC45, which can zoom to a blistering 187 mph.

The tweak-your-bike sim aspects don't go too far: select automatic or manual, pick the tire compounds, and tinker with the final drive/sprocket set ratio. The "realism" options let you decide if you want to deal with such things as engine overheat or radiator damage.

A nice feature is the trainer mode, where you follow a "trainer racer" to get familiar with the tracks. When you've got a handle on the racing, pick one of the 10 available real-life tracks (Porto Korinthos in Greece, the Canuga Speedway in the US, etc.) and race from just three to an exhausting 66 laps.

CHS supports force feedback, network play for up to six (no Internet or modem play), and split-screen play for two. While the racer-techno soundtrack is decent, the 3Dfx graphics aren't. Smoke is pixelated, skid marks look very generic, and the background seems bland.

CHS, hyped as "the first true motorcycle simulation for the PC," is supposed to be less of an arcade racer than games like Manx TT, giving you a sense of what it's like to participate in a realistic superbike experience. You do get to follow a whole season of racing, just like the real thing. But Intense could've thrown in a lot more to give this game a boost: more realistic crashes, more options to tweak (like bike parts), and, obviously, access to more than just one superbike. *—Danny W. Lam*

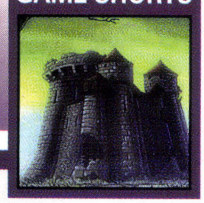
CASTROL HONDA SUPERBIKE

GAMEPLAY: C
GETTING STARTED: B+
GRAPHICS: C
3D ACCELERATED: B-
MULTIPLAYER: B
SOUND CHECK: C

C OVERALL

Not enough options, bikes or excitement.

DEVELOPER: Interactive Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Intense Entertainment 888-240-6172
WEB: www.intense-games.com
REQUIRES: P90 with 3D card (P133 without), 16MB RAM, 32MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P200, 32MB RAM, D3D card
STREET PRICE: $50



Hexplore

Simple swords and sorcery

Without any hype or advertising, this months-old marriage of Diablo's role-playing elements and Gauntlet's simple arcade butchery has stealthily crossed the Atlantic, just now becoming available to American gamers.

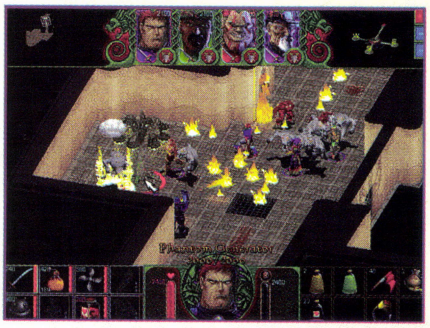
Hexplore sends you on a quest for a mystical book with a party of four members—adventurer, archer, warrior, and magician. You slay monsters, collect weapons, and interact with NPCs just long enough for them to point the way to the next bunch of monsters. Your two—count 'em, two—stats are Hit Points and XP (Experience Points). Collecting XP will increase the damage your weapons do and increase your HP limit. Sound familiar? Good, because so will the rest of the game.

Fortunately, many of Hexplore's details are creative and interesting: the Glores juggle their knives, bored Guard Captains yawn, snow falls, lava bubbles, and flags wave. The voxel engine manages to render all this quite smoothly, and although it's not 3D-polygon magic, it's handsome in a retro sort of way. The well-done animated cut-scenes are a welcome reward for the plentiful bloodletting that precedes them, and older PCs should have no trouble hustling those voxels right along.

The sound effects are top-notch, from the whistling winds and tweeting birds to the howls of the undead. In painful contrast is the NPC voice-acting. In the hundreds of games I've played, I've never heard worse. Almost every voice sounds as if it came from someone who just woke up and is unsure of what it is they're reading.

While many gamers may be turned off by Hexplore's grainy graphics and lack of traditional RPG elements, the game's solid and consistent hack-'n'-slash adventure will sustain those looking for simpler fare.

—Matt Holmes



The battles are blurry and confusing, but fun.

HEXPLORE

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A+
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C

B OVERALL

Engrossing hack-'n'-slash romp.

DEVELOPER:	Heliovisions
PUBLISHER:	Infogrames 408-289-1200
WEB:	www.infogrames.net
REQUIRES:	P90, 18MB RAM
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

Safecracker

Puzzles and more puzzles

In movies, when the bad guys bust open a safe, it's always a crucial, climactic, exciting part of the story. But what if you had to do it over and over, like some hypercompulsive SimThief? That's Safecracker.

This new crook "sim" has you breaking into safe after safe, with the goal of gaining the clues and skills necessary for cracking the ultimate high-tech vault: the F-9-12. Using Apple's QuickTime VR for its display, the game is easily navigable—you just click and drag the direction you want to turn—and there are such niceties as panoramic views and zooming. But QuickTime is more impressive on a Web site than it is as a gaming platform, and if you're already using QuickTime 3.0, you have to install the game's version 2.1.2 (included on the disc) in order to play.

The 360-degree panoramic view is cool, but hardly innovative.

The sound effects and music are well done, adding to the dark ambiance of the house you explore, but the lack of a solid story left me hanging. About the only interaction you have is with the safes, most of which require solving a mind puzzle to "crack." Some, such as a jukebox safe where you match singers to their songs, are clever. Others, like a safe that requires you to solve a jumbled-image puzzle, aren't. (Remember those puzzles where one plastic square was missing and you had to rearrange all the others? They were annoying then and they're annoying now.)

Safecracker is an easy game to get started and to get around in, and it's light on the system requirements. But if you want to do more than wander room to room cracking safes by solving (somewhat difficult) puzzles, wait for a game with the right combination of mental intrigue and fun.

—Joel Strauch

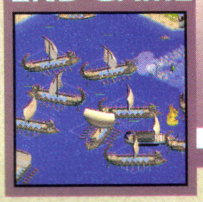
SAFECRACKER

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	B

D OVERALL

Not all it's cracked up to be.

DEVELOPER:	Daydream Software
PUBLISHER:	PXL Computers/clickBOOM 416-868-6388
WEB:	pxlcomputers.com
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 15MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 24MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40



End Game

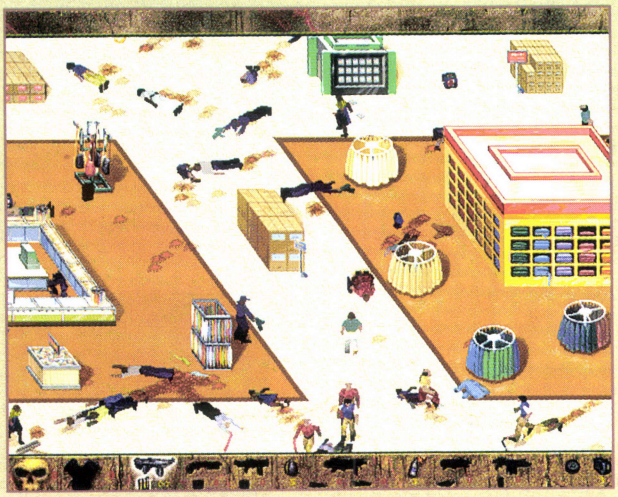
By Peter Olafson

Your indispensable guide to notable add-ons, compilations, updated versions, and other bargains

Timelapse is back, and that's a good thing. This four-CD, photorealistic graphic adventure, which sold more than 200,000 copies when initially released by GTE in 1996, has held up nicely.

There's a decided beauty and a certain rationale to its construction. The puzzles aren't off in their own worlds, but tied more closely to yours. This version offers a sensible replacement for note-taking, as well as multiple endings. And here's something that's a little difficult to convey: the rather pleasant sensation you get from being inside it. Good to see someone finally picked it up for distribution after GTE's exit from the game world. (Hammerhead Entertainment; www.barracudagssm.com; $35) **B+**

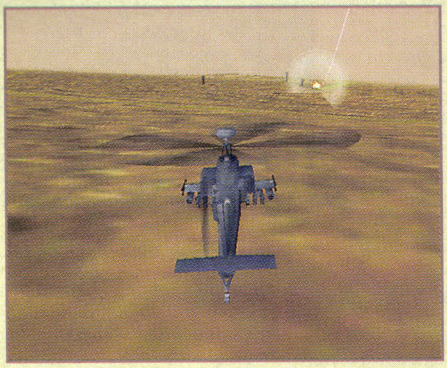
I enjoyed Postal for a while in a guilty, brown-paper-wrapper sort of way, and I enjoyed it again, despite myself, via the **Special Delivery** add-on.



Postal: Special Delivery

But I find I can't play either the parent game or the add-on for very long. While the story does provide rationalization for your ostensible killing spree, it's laid out in the docs, not the game. The game itself feels a little too much like real life.

This add-on—which loads much faster than the poky original—preserves the, um, unique qualities of Postal. You'll have to deal with 24 new types of shrieking bystanders trailing blood across four new levels: an earthquake-ravaged city (hey, you're just what it needs!), a department store, a shantytown, and a resort. Be merciful. (Running With Scissors; www.runningwithscissors.com; $15 alone, $30 bundled with Postal) **B-**



The Longbow Anthology

You simply will not find better helicopter sims than Jane's Longbow games, and, with the added 3D-accelerator support on **Longbow Anthology** (which collects both games along with the Flash Point: Korea add-on), you won't find better-looking ones. They're absolutely stunning and ready for Jane's Combat.net (a recently launched matching service at **www.janescombat.net**). (Jane's Combat Sims; www.janes.ea.com; $45) **A**

If you just can't get enough of Age of Empires, you may want to take a peek at **Final Conquest**. The scenarios I played (there are more than 100 on the CD) seemed decent. But the collection as a whole isn't quite satisfying. Like many third-party efforts, Final Conquest lacks a sense of polish—here owing to scant docs and awkwardly phrased scenario descriptions. (Head Games; www.headgames.net; $20) **C+**

Infogrames' **Red Sea Operations** add-on for F-22 ADF is as competent and seamless a creation as the svelte DID flight sim into which it's inserted. My only complaint about the 30-plus missions (arranged in four tours of duty) is a certain passionlessness...and I'm not sure whether that's the sim or the add-on talking. (Infogrames; www.infogrames.net; $15 alone, $45 bundled with F-22 ADF) **B**

NovaLogic has enclosed its three Voxel 2 games (Comanche 3, Armored Fist 2, and F-22 Lightning II) and a thick manual in a single wrapper. Nicely done—though F-22 isn't quite in a class with its sister games. But why the cheesy name, **World of Combat 2000**? Maybe now that NovaLogic's NovaWorld matching service (**novaworld.net**) is up and running, it wants to put "world" in everything. (NovaLogic; www.novalogic.com; $40) **B**

Steel Panthers Arsenal is a good value. It includes all three of the SSI turn-based tank games and all four data discs. That's right, four. The never-in-retail add-on for SPIII includes 35 scenarios, three campaigns, and a multiplayer version for Windows 95 systems. (Regrettably, it works only with SPIII.) (SSI; www.ssionline.com; $40) **B**

Ultimate Sim Series offers the SimCity line's benchmark release (the full-bodied 2D of SimCity 2000: Special Edition) and its recent flirtations with 3D (SimCopter and The Streets of SimCity). Copter's an immersive, task-oriented flight sim, and Streets, while something of a SimCity disaster in its own right, has some entertainment value as a plain old driving game. But the ultimate sim here is SC2K. (Maxis; www.maxis.com; $30) **B-**

3D Ultra Pinball Collector's Edition combines the three games in that uneven but entertaining series, a videotaped history of the hobby, and the third iteration of the wonderful, Rube Goldberg–like The Incredible Machine (which is just pinball-esque enough to fit in). (Sierra On-Line; www.sierra.com; $25) **B**

STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

By Danny W. Lam

Generally, cheating isn't a very good idea. But with some games, it's a necessity. Scope out what we've uncovered for you this month, get past that freaky level, and teach the computer who's boss.

Get Medieval

During the game, type:

mpkfa: Permanent full health, ammo, and magic.

mpbodyguard: Player takes zero damage.

mphighlander: Gives 99 lives.

mpthewolf: Go to next level.

mpbadmofo: Go to previous level.

mpbringthegimp: Go to the boss area.

mpignition: Gives keys.

mpturbocharger: Gives scrolls.

mppetrol: Gives health.

mparmorall: Gives armor.

mpglovebox: Gives weapon.

mpshoes: Gives 99 souls.

mpironpockets: Robber thief can't steal from player.

mpbandaid: Player doesn't bleed health.

Hexplore

During the game, press Enter, type a code, then press Enter again. (Note: Codes are case-sensitive.)

Mister White: God mode.

Talking To Me: Kills all enemies.

Rat Race: Full life.

Satisfaction: Gives temporary weapon-speed to selected heroes.

Think Positive: Gives temporary weapon double-damage to selected heroes.

What A Difference: Gives temporary walk-speed boost to selected heroes.

My Drug #: Gives ammo to selected weapon (e.g., My Drug 100).

Glory Day: No fog.

I'll Take You There #: Change episode/level (e.g., I'll Take You There 1 takes you to Episode 0, Level 1).

Show: Shows mouse-cursor position in man.

WarGames

In single-player mode, hit t, then type:

chaching: Adds 10,000 to cash total every time it's entered.

twobyfour x (where **"x"** is a unit type): Builds units (e.g., twobyfour dragoon).

hermes: Speeds up building of units.

donkeys: Anything that fires a missile (WOPR missile silo/ WOPR hunter) now fires jeeps instead of missiles.

gimmiegimmie: Allows you to build everything, even without command center.

mrmuscle: Upgrades player's armor.

bigsofty: Downgrades enemy's armor.

coffee: Upgrades player's speed.

beer: Downgrades enemy's speed.

unclejohn: God mode.

shaft: Upgrades player's firepower.

shank: Downgrades enemy's firepower.

In single- or multiplay, hit t, then type:

saladtossed: Choose any level. (After typing, go to the load screen and hit **Ctrl-h-w**.)

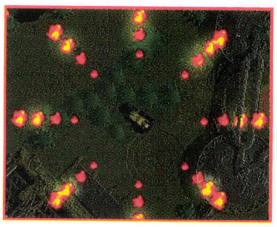
morningafter: Removes fog of war.

eyeofgod: Allows extra level of zoom on lower-level machines.

Bonus: Head on over to **www.pcgames.com** for mission hints!

Vangers

Type these codes during the game:



bolshedeneg: Increase cash.

hochutuda: All keys open.

udacha: Increase Luck.

avtoritet: Increase Dominance.

QUICK BITS

Spearhead

During the game, hold down the s, p, e, a, r, and h keys, then press Backspace. You're now invulnerable.

DEMONSTRATION:

1. Tear out this page.
2. Crumple into ball.
3. Toss over your shoulder.

▶ The sound this ad will make when it hits the ground *behind* you is the power of A3D™ from Aureal, the only audio that works the way your ears do.

No wonder game makers like Interplay and GT Interactive are featuring A3D in their newest titles. Experience it for yourself at www.A3D.com

BELIEVE YOUR EARS™

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STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

Rainbow Six

During the game, press Enter to bring up the chat bar, type a code, then press Enter again.

teamgod: Team god-mode.

avatargod: God mode.

nobrainer: Disables AI (even your teammates').

5fingerdiscount: Replenishes ammo.

explore: Turns off victory conditions. (Hit Esc to abort.)

turnpunchkick: Enables side-scroller mode.

1-900: Heavy-breathing mode.

clodhopper: Grasshopper mode.

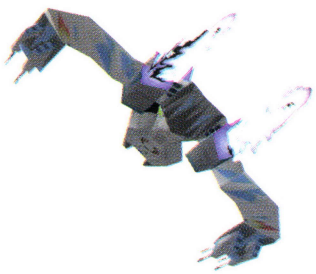
bignoggin: Big heads on.

meganoggin: Huge heads.

stumpy: Stumpy mode.

Ares Rising

In single-player mode during gameplay, press Shift-C (which activates the chat interface). Now type in the following codes and hit Esc (rather than Enter) to cancel the chat. (Note: Unlike the cheats you can activate from the Options screen, you can use these and still succeed in a mission.)



DieDieDie: Kill target.

IamTheMaster: Win mission.

GoingAndGoing: Unlimited fuel.

ShootEmUp: Unlimited ammo.

BigAssShields: Invulnerability.

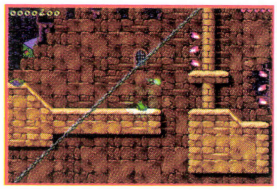
WonderWoman: Invisibility.

Gex: Enter the Gecko

To access all levels:

At the main map, hit Esc to pause. Now, while holding down the h key, use the arrow keys and hit right, right, left, right, spacebar, down, and right. Hit Esc again to resume the game, then hit F1. You now have access to all the levels via three cheat menus you can circulate through. Note: You'll need to input this cheat each time you finish a level and return to the main map.

Jazz Jackrabbit 2



During the game, type these codes, then press Enter.

jjgod: God mode.

jjinv: Invulnerability.

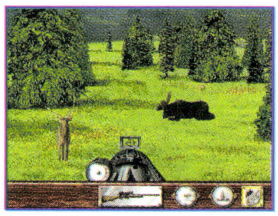
jjammo: Full ammo for each weapon.

jjbird: Calls Chuck the Bird to come help you.

jjmorph: Morphs you through different characters.

To change the color of the text you type in multiplay, press the "|" (the pipe character, above Enter) key.

Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter



On the Main Menu screen (by the weapons), type:

bghorns: Get only sheep.

bgyogi: Get only bear.

bgelkabong: Get only elk.

bgbullwinkle: Get only moose.

bgnoah: Double the number of animals.

bgsteroids: Creates maximum-sized animals.

On Map View screen, type:

bgshow: Shows animals in the map view.

bgtrack: Moves the hunter instantly to the new location.

bgurine: Attracts the animals to the hunter.

bgvampire: Shows blood trail on the map view.

On Hunt View screen, type:

bgbarbecue: Rocket launcher.

bgweather: Turns on weather.

bgsniper: Toggles weapon-wobble on/off.

Lode Runner 2

During the game, press Esc to bring up the pop-up menu. With the pop-up dialog showing, type **glazed donut** *to enable cheats. (If you hear laughter and a gong sound, it worked.) You can now use these cheat keys:*

F3: Go back a level.

F4: Advance a level.

Alt-F12: Gain five lives. (Works in single-play only.)

Alt-8: Unlimited bombs. (Works in single-play only.)

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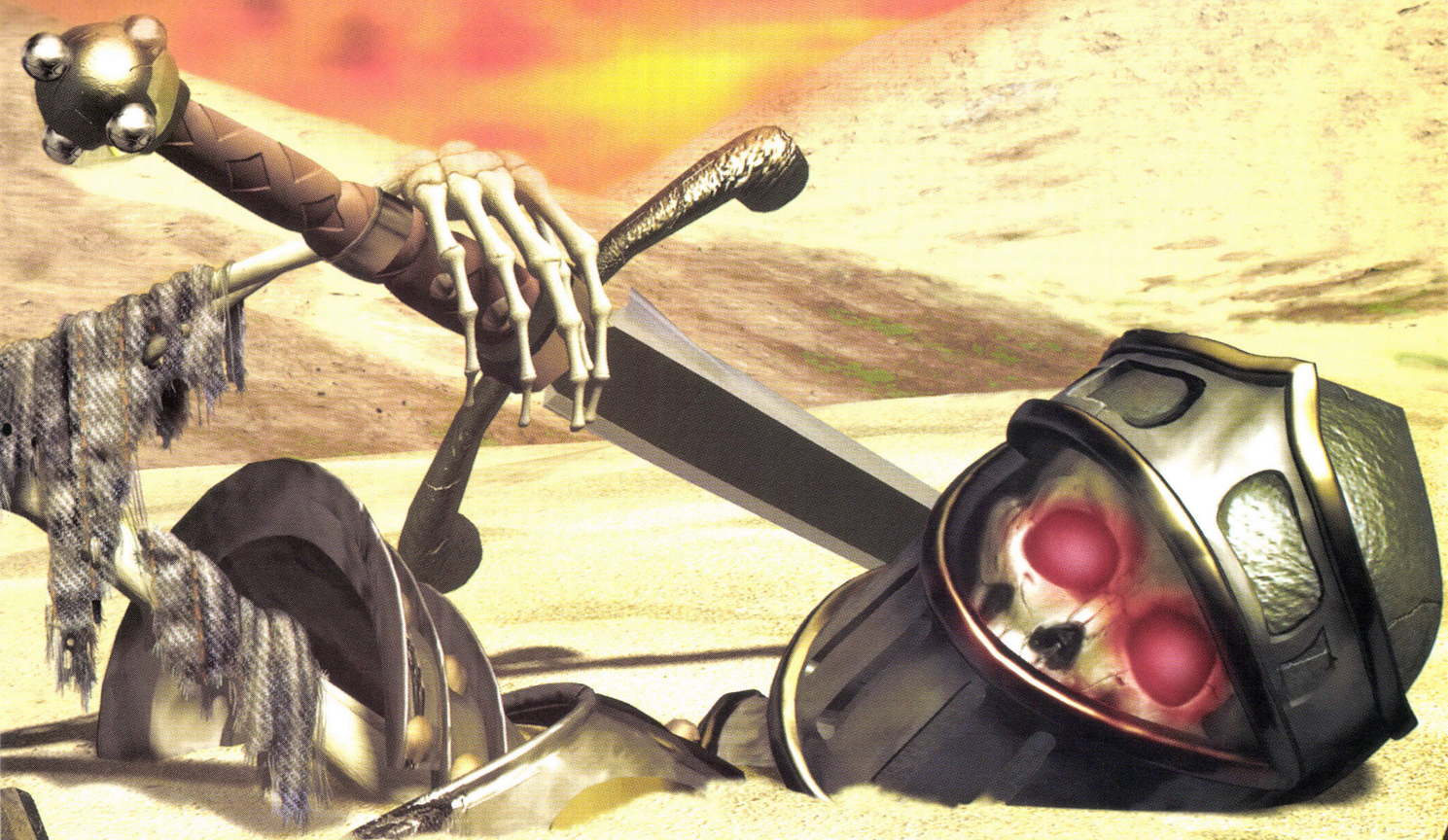

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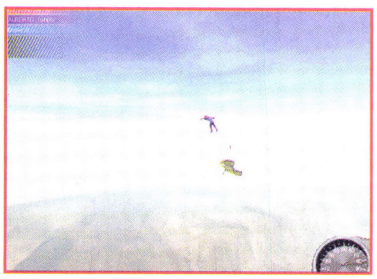
STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

Motocross Madness

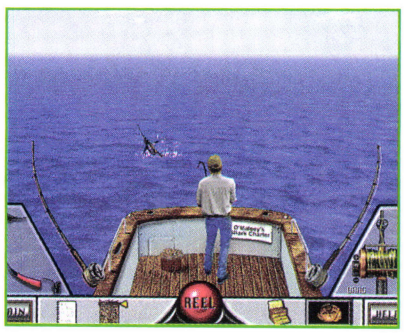
Try this high-flyin' Easter egg during gameplay:



Choose the Stunt Quarry Track and select any stage. Go to the end barrier and ride up to the top—it may take several tries and a lot of speed. When you get to the top, keep riding to the middle for a spectacular sight.

Deep Sea Trophy Fishing

During the game, type:



ds10x: Attracts fish at 10 times the normal rate.

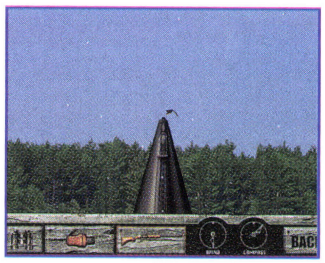
dsnobreak: Keeps the line from breaking.

dscatchnow: Allows a fish to be caught immediately.

dsbluemarlin: The next fish caught will be a Blue Marlin.

Bird Hunter: Waterfowl Edition

On both Hunt View and Map View screens, type:



dggoldenegg: Makes birds more curious, less likely to spook.

dgluckyducky: Many, many birds.

On Hunt View screen, type:

dgeggsact: Stops gun wobble.

dgfamine: Makes birds look for a feeding site.

dgsnowgoose: Weather effects.

dgtoughday: Makes birds look for a rest site.

dgyadayada: Makes hunter more likely to speak.

On Map View screen, type:

dgbirdseye: Show bird icons.

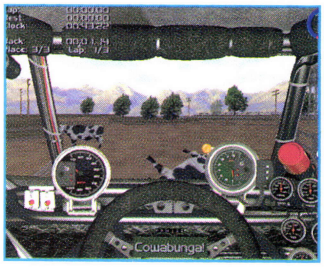
dgdaffy: Only ducks will fly onto the map.

dgmother: Only geese.

dgwarp: Allows hunter to teleport across map.

Monster Truck Madness 2

Try these Easter eggs during gameplay:



For a little back-country humor, first choose the Farm Road Track. When the game starts, hit p to pause the game. Choose Options, Game, select "show commentary," then go back to the game. After you get past Checkpoint Two, go over the train tracks, but instead of following the track, go straight. You'll see a farm ahead: drive through the fence to get to the cows. Hit the cows and you'll see the word "Cowabunga!" along with commentary. The barn owner will also berate you for your negligence.

There's also a little "do not disturb" Easter egg on the Sidewinder Canyon Track. Immediately after Checkpoint One, you'll see barricades on both sides of the road. Run over the ones on the right and you'll enter an area with buses and tents. Run into a tent and a voice will say: "Hey! I'm still in here!"

Return Fire 2

To go to any map level:

When you're on the map-selection screen, place the mouse cursor and click on each of the four rivets in the upper-right box (the one your name is in) in this order: top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right. You can then use the arrow buttons to select any map.

Check out these Easter eggs, too:

During the game, pull up the command line (by pressing the ~ key) and type **easter!**. Now everything that you blow up will explode into Easter eggs rather than the normal flying bits.

When you're in your command bunker about to pick a vehicle, pull up the command line and type **fubar!**. This will take one of the jeeps from your inventory and strap one of the jet's 1,000-pound bombs to its roof. Be careful: the jeep only has one hit point, so if you take any damage—even by making too big of a jump—you'll explode and take out quite a bit around you. (Note: Using this cheat will disable scoring points, moving up ranks, and receiving medals.)

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By George T. Chronis

K6-2 Delivers Cheap Speed

Thank the Game Gods for AMD. Because we live in an era when our speedy new PCs can barely keep up with the latest games after merely a year in service, keeping upgrade costs down is becoming a critical mission objective. Left by itself, with total control of CPU sales and Slot 1 (Pentium II) motherboard licensing, Intel would have less incentive to make hot new processors affordable. But with AMD banging on Intel's citadel with a battering ram called K6-2, Intel has no choice but to play the low-price game.

In the April 1998 issue of *PC Games*, we built a PC using a 233MHz K6 chip. Our experience was extremely favorable. Except with games that make extensive use of floating-point unit (FPU) calculations (like Quake II), the K6 proved to be as fast or faster at running Windows 95 games—at a much lower price. That 233MHz system fell between a P233 and a PII 266 in performance.

Knowing that the K6 was designed to excel in running business applications, AMD went back and redesigned the chipset to make it a better game performer—especially since the company was now the main sponsor of the Professional Gamers' League. Since the K6's main drawback was its less-than-stellar FPU performance, AMD crafted a set of software enablers it called 3DNow. Games or programs written to take advantage of 3DNow would get Pentium II–like FPU performance. After AMD got Cyrix to use 3DNow for its processors as well, Microsoft—never wanting to ignore a significant market-share opportunity—wrote 3DNow support into DirectX 6.0 (DX6).

DreamWorks has 3DNow running in Trespasser.

The end result is that the K6-2 has the FPU horsepower for games (see 3DNow Games sidebar), either via DX6 or because developers are writing to the 3DNow API, as id Software did with Quake II (v. 3.14 and later). Like 350MHz (and higher) Pentium IIs, the K6-2 is also a 100MHz processor—taking advantage of newer motherboards' 100MHz bus. If you own one of the new Super Socket 7 motherboards that can be set to 100MHz, the K6-2 will be substantially quicker than the 233MHz and 266MHz K6s running on 66MHz motherboards. What's more, the new Super Socket 7 motherboards also come with an Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP), so there's no major feature on a 100MHz Intel BX Slot 1 mainboard that you can't build into a K6-2 PC.

Reconstructive Surgery

Despite the fact that our original K6 system's performance was still potent—running everything from Unreal to Urban Assault without a hiccup—we wanted a firsthand evaluation of the K6-2. AMD had shipped us a speed-tweaked test unit running at a not-cleared-for-retail 333MHz clock speed on an odd 95MHz motherboard. With a 3Dfx Voodoo reference accelerator installed and equipped with an ultra-SCSI hard drive, this test system is a screamer—sustaining 66 fps in Quake II at 640-by-480 resolution (see Game Frames sidebar for more benchmarks). But most gamers can't get AMD engineers to specially tweak their systems, so to get a better handle on reality, we decided to rebuild our K6 machine as a K6-2.

In years past, a good motherboard would last you at least two or three years and allow for upgrades in CPUs and memory. But just like with video cards, a motherboard purchased today will be overshadowed within six to eight months. The ASUS TX-97E used in the original K6 system is a great motherboard, but since we built our K6 PC, bus speeds have jumped from 66MHz to 100MHz, and AGP has been added. Although you can juggle voltage and clock-speed jumpers on the TX-97E so that a K6-2 will run on it, neither AMD nor ASUS recommends or supports K6-2s on this motherboard.

3DNow Games

Ares Rising	(Imagine Studios)
Golgotha	(Crack Dot Com)
Incoming	(Rage)
MIA	(Semis)
Baseball 3D	(Microsoft)
Quake II	(id Software)
Sub Culture	(Criterion)
Team Apache	(Semis)
Trespasser	(DreamWorks)
Unreal	(Epic MegaGames)
Xenocracy	(Semis)

CPU Comparison

CPU	Processor Score	Hard-Drive Score
K6 (233MHz)	188	207
K6-2 (300MHz)	248	215
K6-2 (333MHz)	245	349
Pentium II (300MHz)	244	311

(Measured against a baseline Pentium 200MHz PC, with 100 being "average.")

Since most gamers don't want to risk frying a CPU, we had to buy a new motherboard. And since we wanted to run reliably at 100MHz bus speeds, we also had to buy new PC-100 SDRAM memory. Now, before you go and start griping at AMD, remember that you'd have to do the same thing if you wanted to move up from a 66MHz Intel LX motherboard to a 100MHz BX model—including buying PC-100 SDRAM. These upgrades are made less painful by the fact that K6-2 CPUs and Super Socket 7 motherboards cost so much less than Pentium II parts (see What It Cost sidebar).

As for the motherboard, we checked the list of AMD-recommended Super Socket 7 models, and of the examples that were available to us locally, we chose the Microstar 5169. That set us back $95. The 300MHz K6-2 CPU cost us $140, and two 32MB PC-100 SDRAM chips added another $90. Total cost: $325. Comparable Slot 1 BX components and a 300MHz Pentium II CPU would've cost $513.

Installation

Because we already had existing PC components that were staying in the case—a 4.6GB Fujitsu Ultra DMA hard drive, a 12MB Canopus Pure3D II LX Voodoo II accelerator, and a Monster Sound M80 sound card—switching out the motherboard and transferring the video and sound cards only took an hour and a half.

The only peripheral we changed along the way was our video card. STB's PCI Velocity 128ZX is a strong performer, but we now had a motherboard with AGP, so of course we wanted to see how that worked. In went a Diamond Stealth II G460 AGP 2D/3D video card.

Next we had to decide what OS to install. A major consideration was that Win 98 has AGP support built in, while Win 95B requires downloading a separate USB patch, which has the AGP drivers buried within it. Since discretion is better than fussing with a cranky OS, we decided to wipe the hard drive clean and install Win 98 fresh. It powered up cleanly and had zero hardware conflicts.

In the case of the USB ports, Win 98 found and set them up flawlessly. But despite the fact that Win 98 recognized the Aladdin AGP chipset and installed drivers for it, too (and those drivers were active without conflicts), the G460 was stuck in 256 colors at 640-by-480 resolution—meaning the AGP port wasn't active. Rummaging through the Microstar motherboard box produced a utilities disc, on which was an install option for Aladdin AGP drivers. We gave them a try and restarted the system. After rebooting to the Win 98 desktop, the AGP port was operating perfectly, and the G460 had its full range of resolutions and colors.

What It Cost

K6-2 300MHz	$140
Microstar 5169 motherboard	$95
Two 32MB PC-100 SDRAMs	$90
Total	$325
Pentium II 300MHz	$288
ASUS BX6 motherboard	$135
Two 32MB PC-100 SDRAMs	$90
Total	$513

How It Played

We hoped that the K6-2 PC we'd just built would come close to the fantastic benchmark numbers posted by the tweaked test-system cobbled together by AMD. While our system

Team Apache is K6-2–ready.

posted some definite and significant performance increases over the original K6 233, it wasn't as fast as we expected. Our frame rates in Quake II jumped from 34 fps to 45 fps, but they fell short of the 66 fps clocked by AMD's system and the 60 fps we usually get with a similarly Voodoo II–equipped 300MHz Pentium II. Unreal delivered benchmarks on our 300MHz K6-2 that came out a bit lower than the Quake II results, but the Incoming benchmarks mirrored those we got in Quake II.

The good news is that software developers are keenly aware of 3DNow and actively working on adding support for the protocol—either directly or via DX6. AMD has been very aggressive about seeding K6-2 systems with game developers so that they can get real-world experience with the CPU and its capabilities.

After many hours playing on both K6-2s, we concluded that PCs based on this processor run games as smoothly as Pentium IIs, and depending on what clock speed you purchase, they may even run them faster. Given how much less K6-2s cost, we'd trade a few hundred bucks for a few frames here or there. With Microsoft's addition of 3DNow support to DX6, the K6-2 is a worthy opponent to Intel if you're thinking about putting together a swift game system on a budget. Use the money you save to buy more games, a better 3D card, or a down payment on an ISDN high-speed Internet connection.

Game Frames

CPU/12MB Voodoo II	Quake II (6-by-4)	Unreal (6-by-4)	Incoming (6-by-4)
K6 (233MHz)	34 fps	21 fps	28 fps
K6-2 (300MHz)	45 fps	31 fps	42 fps
K6-2 (333MHz)	66 fps	34 fps	45 fps
Pentium II (300MHz)	60 fps	43 fps	58 fps

By George T. Chronis
& Matt Holmes

3D's Explosive New Screamers

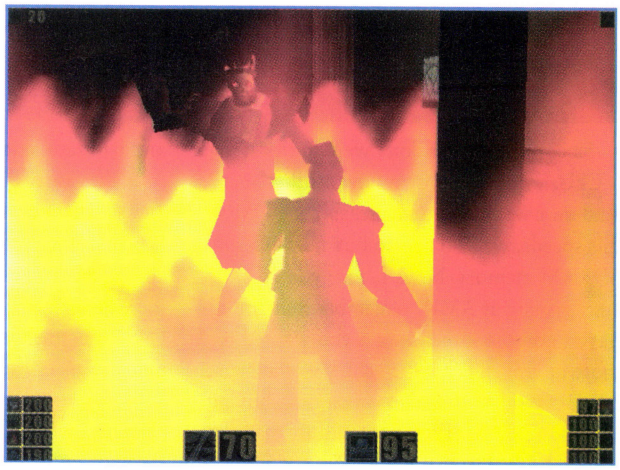
If you think that video-card makers, like the rest of the industry, are scamming gamers by forcibly obsolescing our barely six-month-old 2D/3D video "high-performance" boards, we'd be inclined to agree. While we hate that graphics technology has fallen into a six- to eight-month turnover cycle, it's hard to ignore the extra muscle being bolted into each new generation of video cards.

By year's end, we'll be sorting through four—count 'em, four—new graphics chipsets: 3Dfx's Banshee, nVIDIA's TNT, S3's Savage3D, and PowerVR's Next Generation. And let's not forget we've already been presented with Voodoo II and Intel740 in 1998. Sheesh!

Since these chipset introductions descend on us as quickly as a tornado, we're jumping at the chance to look at almost-ready-for-retail versions. Within a week, *PC Games* received a reference AGP Banshee card from 3Dfx and an early production example of STB's AGP Velocity 4400, which uses nVIDIA's RIVA TNT chipset. It's ironic that 3Dfx and nVIDIA are going after each other's bread-and-butter—TNT is aimed at the hardcore gamer and 3Dfx's Banshee at the low-end OEM business. Keeping in mind that both chipsets will be on store shelves by the time you read this issue, here's what we can tell you despite being cursed with immature drivers and few display utilities that worked.

3Dfx Banshee

The good folks at 3Dfx got a bloody nose in 1997 with their Voodoo Rush chipset. The idea was to promote a more affordable Voodoo that could exist on the same board with SVGA graphics. For a long time, 3Dfx had wanted to break out of its comfortable gaming niche and develop a mass-market 2D/3D product that computer makers would put into their new PCs. Rush wasn't that product—3Dfx left the 2D up to video-board makers, and too many Rush boards didn't work reliably as billed. But that didn't stop 3Dfx. Enter Banshee, its AGP counterattack—one we think will succeed because it delivers SVGA and Voodoo in the same chipset package.



The 3D video wars are heating up.

Banshee isn't Voodoo II, but it's similar enough to be a helluva lot faster than Voodoo. But Banshee uses only one texture-memory unit compared to the Voodoo II's dual implementations. The 3Dfx design team gave the Banshee a higher fill rate—100 Mpixels per second compared to 90. If you're running Glide or D3D games that throw out their textures in one pass—the majority of 3D games—Banshee will be slightly faster than a Voodoo II card. But if the game's like Quake II and does its texturing in two passes, the Voodoo II's second texture-memory unit steps in to better handle these more complex textures. 3Dfx plans to up the ante later, with subsequent generations of Banshees getting 125 Mpixel-per-second fill rates. Since the increase will come thanks to a more efficient production process, you won't be able to upgrade from 100 Mpixels to 125 Mpixels.

One advantage to the Banshee is large resolutions. It dials up 1,024-by-768 resolutions in Quake II—no costly second board in Scan Line Interleave (SLI) mode needed. Thanks to its 128-bit 2D hardware, SVGA performance in Win 95/98 is pretty speedy, since all of Windows' graphic-display needs are handled in-hardware by Banshee's 2D engine.

The early 8MB board *PC Games* received worked fine, with the exception that the alpha drivers included had the gamma controls disabled. Even so, the Banshee posted great numbers. Unfortunately, at this stage, the alpha drivers needed special patches to make Quake II and Unreal play. And the Unreal patch didn't work, so we couldn't run it to get scores. The Banshee also has a tough time with Incoming in 1,024-by-768 resolution. We got screen graphics but no text, so we have no idea what the average frame-rate was.

Bottom line, the Banshee has an opportunity to clean up with people who aren't hardcore gamers but are involved enough to want decent performance. It has the 3Dfx name, it has outstanding performance, and it'll cost around $100. It's not hard to assume that computer makers will also jump at the chance to equip their sub-$1,000 PCs with such great SVGA and 3D performance. Banshee's going to rock the 3D world.

Game Frames • Banshee

Banshee I 300MHz PII	640-by-480	800-by-600	1,024-by-768
Quake II	59 fps	39 fps	25 fps
Incoming	59 fps	52 fps	N/A

RIVA TNT

You'd think that nVIDIA would be content with the home run it hit last year with the RIVA 128 chipset. Not likely. Having made

major inroads into the mass market, nVIDIA looked next upon the performance market and decided to assail 3Dfx and the Voodoo II with a better 2D/3D RIVA board.

The (estimated) $199 STB Velocity 4400 is the first RIVA TNT board to be released, and it doesn't disappoint. Like the Banshee, the 4400's 3D fill-rate will start out at 100 Mpixels per second and grow to 125 Mpixels per second later, when nVIDIA starts producing a more efficient chipset. But like the Voodoo II, the 4400 comes with two texture-memory units, making it potentially faster than a Voodoo II—although the TNT cannot be SLI'd like the Voodoo II.

The TNT-based 4400 has a 24-bit Z-buffer and 32-bit color, which should give much better 3D picture quality than the original

Which board maker will have the fastest 3D card this fall?

RIVA, and possibly as good as or better than a Voodoo II's. The 4400 can definitely reach higher resolutions, up to 1,600-by-1,200. These features also make for SVGA graphics with better clarity and color depth than with the original RIVA 128.

Despite the somewhat buggy beta drivers available at the time we tested it, this new Velocity wowed us with its smooth handling of both Direct3D and OpenGL games. The 16MB of onboard memory allows resolutions up to 1,600-by-1,200. Many games don't even allow the selection of resolutions that high. Games based on the Quake II engine work without any tweaking by merely selecting the "Default OpenGL" driver. No doubt about it—even with beta drivers, the TNT manages outstanding fps performance.

3D Is Looking Good

By the time you read this, Banshee and TNT boards should be on store shelves. From what we've seen so far, both chipsets are going to be fantastic additions to an already crowded field. We tend to be partial to the Banshee, thanks to its pocket-battleship performance on a budget. In a package that 3Dfx expects will street near $100, Banshee is a way for computer makers to cash in on the Voodoo franchise without unduly boosting the price of their PCs. But TNT boards like STB's 4400 will be going out the door for $50 to $75 less than a Voodoo II, making it a good value, too. *PC Games* will run full reviews as soon as we get retail versions of these products.

Game Frames • TNT

TNT I 300MHz PII	640-by-480	800-by-600	1,024-by-768
Quake II	62 fps	59 fps	N/A
Incoming	53 fps	54 fps	49 fps

HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

PC GAMES

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games'* running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	ViewSonic G790 19-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $845	A
CD-ROM drive	Sony CDU-711 32x	Sony Corp; 800-476-6972; approx. $99	A-
Sound card	Montego A3DXstream	Turtle Beach; 800-233-9377; approx. $99	A
Speakers	ACS55 Power Gaming System	Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; approx. $150	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 760-598-2518; $70	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 800-426-9400; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 56	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $99	A
SVGA card	Stealth 3D 2000 Pro	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $160	A
2D/3D video card	Velocity 128V	STB; 800-234-4334; approx $175	A
Key add-ons	Pure3D II LX video accelerator	Canopus; 888-868-2533; approx. $250	A
	Monster Sound M80	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $199	A

TECHNOBABBLE HARDWARE SPOTLIGHT

ADA305 Digital PowerCube

RATING: B

If you're like me, you've been wondering where the hell all the USB gear went. USB stands for Universal Serial Bus, the new "cure-all" serial connection that can, in theory, let you plug in everything from mice to force-feedback sticks to speakers.

The interesting thing about USB speakers is the idea that you can put the digital-to-analog converter *in the speaker.* Unfortunately, the first USB speakers to hit the market don't work this way. Instead, the ADA305 is a very nice high-end PC speaker system that uses the USB connection to let you control the volume on your speakers as well as manage other attributes of the system, like turning surround-sound processing on and off.

Altec Lansing's Digital ADA305 PowerCube is a three-piece speaker system that includes Altec's patented Dolby Surround imaging. The system delivered excellent sound quality through two 10-watt satellite speakers and a separate 24-watt subwoofer. The subwoofer delivers compelling, resonant bass, due in part to its wood-particle housing. The satellite speakers have a very small footprint and facilitate a convincing surround-sound experience by angling a pair of the speakers' drivers so that the sound bounces off the walls and back at you. The signal to these drivers is phase-delayed to increase the psycho-acoustical surround effect. In a nutshell, the surround aspect of this system works much better than you'd expect.

When enhanced with an Aureal-based 3D-sound card, games like Unreal and Jedi continuously cause you to turn your head because you can hear attackers coming from the left and right, even behind you. Dolby-encoded cut-scenes such as those in Origin titles like Wing Commander: Prophecy offer similar surround experiences regardless of your sound card.

Our chief complaint with the ADA305 is the applet that uses USB to control speaker settings. The main advantage of such a system would presumably be the ability to end, once and for all, the "two volume-settings" problem of the Windows sound system: one control on the Task Bar and one on the speakers themselves. Rather than replacing the standard volume control, the Altec software confuses the situation still further by coexisting with it.

While the hardware is great, the software component of the first USB-enabled speakers on the market needs work. (Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; www.altecmm.com; street $199) *—David Gerding*

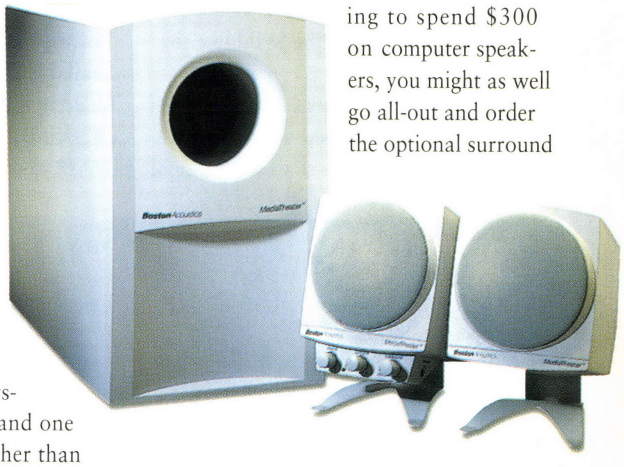
MediaTheater

RATING: C+

You're probably familiar with the name Boston Acoustics, the manufacturer of speakers for high-end home stereos. Like Cambridge SoundWorks, BA is making a big play for audio-minded gamers, most recently with its $299 top-of-the-line MediaTheater. This sound system features a 6.5-inch subwoofer enclosed in a massive 11.75-by-7-by-14.625–inch casing with amazingly powerful 3.5-inch driver satellite speakers.

Putting size aside for a while, the $299 package includes a built-in Dolby Pro Logic decoder. It uses 18-bit converters that emulate "virtual sound," using the left and right speakers to simulate a five-channel system (left, center, right, left rear, right rear). And if you really want to get into it, you'll order the optional rear-surround speaker ($99) for more accurate surround.

The sounds are smooth and the subwoofer pumps out accurate bass without distortion. If you're actually willing to spend $300 on computer speakers, you might as well go all-out and order the optional surround because the sound is just so much more full and accurate. G Police (which uses DirectSound and Q-Sound formats) was much more impressive than with my old Altecs, and the game's aerial combat was enhanced by BA's surround system.



But even without the rear-surround speaker, the MediaTheater does a good job of separating the signals all around, so that it actually sounds like you have a rear source. (You just have to make sure you're sitting right between the speakers.) If there's one flaw in this sub/satellite combo, it's its lack of treble (the MT has a single driver accommodating both mids and highs). Past experiences with systems where the satellites offer separate midrange drivers and tweeters have been much more pleasurable.

The MT is a little too pricey to recommend for just playing Starcraft, but for gamers with cash to burn, it's a solid buy. (Boston Acoustics; 800-246-7767; www.bostonacoustics.com; street $299, optional rear-surround street $99)

—Danny W. Lam

"Wow, I loved that Doppler effect when you spun around and died."

Predator 3D PCI

RATING: B+

There are plenty of good PCI 3D audio boards on the market these days—many using Aureal's A3D technology. But for $60, one of the best values around is Shark's Predator 3D PCI sound card. It uses an A3D sound accelerator to give you true surround-sound, providing audio from behind, above, and below you during gameplay. In gamer's terms, it further immerses you in the game.

I installed the PCI version of the card (the ISA model was reviewed favorably in our September 1998 issue) with few problems. I did have to disable my built-in sound card to clear up some hardware conflicts. The sounds coming out of the Predator blasted through my Altec Lansing ACS55 multimedia gaming speakers with much greater clarity and aplomb than they did with my on-board Yamaha sound-processor.

I fired up Unreal and Jedi Knight, two games that support the A3D technology. I've never been a huge believer in sound being able to greatly enhance gameplay, but Unreal in A3D changed my mind. Not only are the sound effects realistic; with the Predator they're downright frightening. Walking through a dingy dungeon, I found myself actually reacting to the shrill screams echoing around me.

The Predator takes some setting up with Unreal. You'll have to go into the Advanced Options/Audio and turn on the "Use3dhardware" support. And, if you want to play full-screen, you'll need to shut off the "A3D Splash Screen," its sound-card demo, to avoid a weird start-up glitch.

In Jedi Knight, on the other hand, you can just jump into the game with new sound (but make sure you've engaged the Hi-Res Sounds option). The Predator was especially welcome on Microsoft's Gaming Zone (**www.zone.com**). More than once, I was able to catch other deathmatchers sneaking up behind me, not with any Jedi mind tricks, but simply because I could better discern what direction they were coming from. (Shark Multimedia; 800-800-3321; www.sharkmm.com; street $60)

—Joel Strauch

Strike Fighter Series Throttle

RATING: B

When I first saw the Strike Fighter Series Throttle in its pre-production form two years ago, I was salivating. This puppy looked and felt like a flight-sim junkie's dream controller. Modeled after the actual throttles found in the F-15 and F-18 fighter jets, the SFST looked to have it all: raw beauty, power, sophistication, and flexibility.

The SFST's main claim to fame is that it's the first PC throttle to offer two independent throttle grips, each with its own movement mechanisms. Each grip can be used to control an engine in a twin-engine jet, for example. This feature does come at a price—the second grip uses the joystick axis normally reserved for rudder pedals, so you can't use a separate set of pedals with the SFST. However, you can deactivate the left-hand grip to use your pedals or set up the left throttle-grip to provide rudder control, if desired.

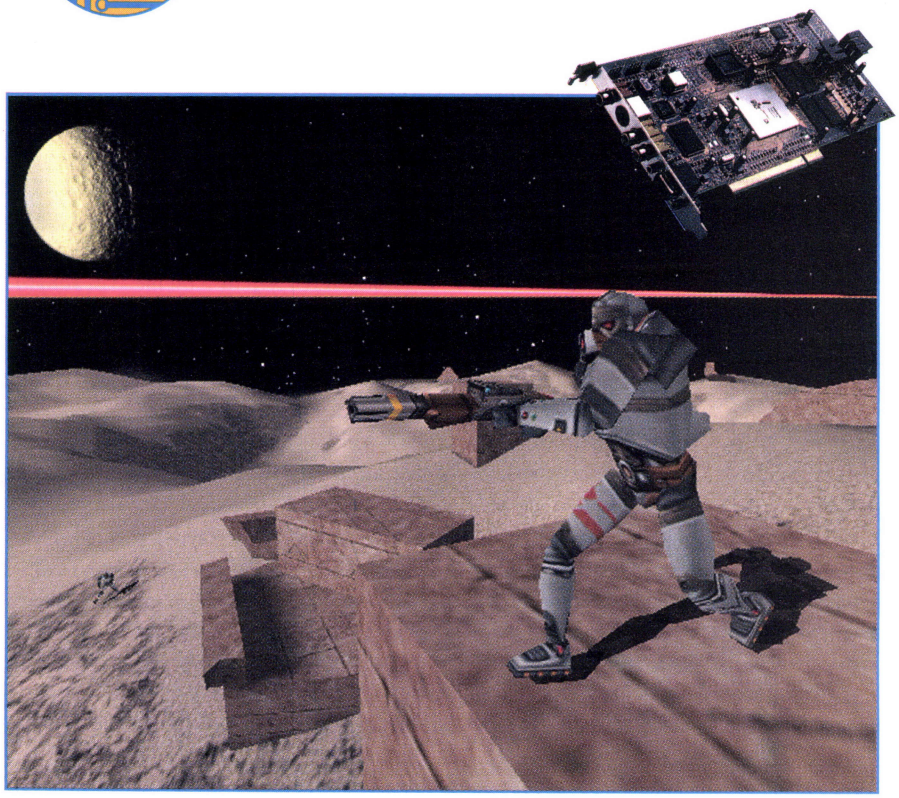
Like the sticks in Suncom's Strike Fighter Series (such as the F-15E Talon), the SFST is quality-built—it'll be a long time before you wear this sucker out, and it can take some serious punishment. Also like the Talon, it's a snap to program. Put the throttle in program mode, press and hold one of its 16 buttons, and then press the keystroke combo you want the button to emulate. Simple. It can be configured to handle up to 64 keyboard functions. The programming instructions are on CD—you'll want to print 'em out.

Unfortunately, you can only store up to four programs at a time. There's no way to save programs you replace, either, so you'll have to manually reprogram the SFST when you reload an old flight sim. You'll probably never play more than four sims at a time, but it's still a bit of a pain in the keister.

Another minor inconvenience is the SFST's pretty hefty footprint, which makes it hard to find a good joystick-throttle-keyboard-mouse setup where you can reach everything easily in the heat of battle.

Still, the SFST is reasonably priced and solid, and the twin-throttle sex-appeal may make it worth adding to your flight-sim controller collection. (Suncom; 847-229-0002; www.suncominc.com; street $89)

—Steve Klett



Direct3D is what the Trinosaur feeds on.

Trinosaur

RATING: C+

The Trinosaur is a well-made 3D card manufactured in Japan by Proside. Its chip is based on Chromatic Research's Mpact2 DVD set, and the card doubles as a game-enhancing 3D accelerator and a DVD encoder.

That means the Trinosaur is not solely meant for gaming, which keeps it a step or two behind some of the more game-oriented chipsets like Voodoo. But if you're into movies, this double personality may be important to you. The Trinosaur is a Direct3D card that does a good job of accelerating games in the D3D roster, such as Jedi Knight and Incoming. It doesn't immediately wow you with the kind of razor-sharp polygons that a Voodoo chip has, but it pops the polys sufficiently.

The Trinosaur does pose an occasional problem that I've seen cropping up in other D3D-based chipsets as well—DirectX driver indigestion. Every so often, at least on my PC, installing a game results in my P233's screen turning into a sea of unintelligible colors and lines. Taking out and reinstalling the D3D card, plus uninstalling and reinstalling the game, made everything work fine.

With its acceptable acceleration, easy installation, and DVD utilities beyond gaming, the Trinosaur could be a low-cost option for a casual gamer who isn't necessarily in the market for a top-line gaming card. But it's definitely coming in second to the top-tier cards, and it'll likely be prey for the likes of 3Dfx's low-cost Banshee chipset. (Proside; 408-490-2836; www.proside.com; street $135) *—Daniel Morris*

Game Frames

Direct3D Performance	640-by-480	800-by-600	1,024-by-768
Incoming	37 fps	28 fps	N/A

Xterminator

RATING: B

Sports and fighting titles—they're basically the members of the game pantheon that keep the makers of gamepads in the black. Gravis has always been a fine purveyor of gamepads, its GrIP line a standout in the cluttered field.

Its new Xterminator wants to be the pad that can best make the crossover into action functions. To do it, Gravis has incorporated elements of a joystick with this pad, offering a wider range of gameplay functionality and making the Xterminator more attractive to gamers in search of an all-purpose peripheral.

The Xterminator's SideWinder-style design is comfortable, but it's certainly more knock-off than advancement. Six programmable digital buttons make any fighting combination a snap for fans of rumble games. But it's the inclusion of a throttle and an eight-way point-of-view switch that makes the Xterminator a nice choice for Descent-style action games—that is, if the feel of a gamepad is more comfortable to you than a joystick, or if you just can't afford both.

The Xterminator: slick features, low price.

With a low price-point and emphasis on mass-market appeal (hence the name), the Xterminator is offered as a do-it-all gamepad. It's actually a very good choice for neophyte or budget-conscious gamers, but it's not the must-have gamepad that the GrIP Pro is, nor is it anywhere near as useful as a real joystick. And as far as sports are concerned, the GrIP is much friendlier. The Xterminator will fill a niche but isn't for the more advanced gamer. (Gravis; 604-431-5020; www.gravis.com; street $35)

—Daniel Morris

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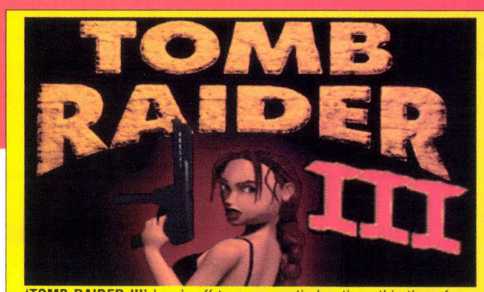

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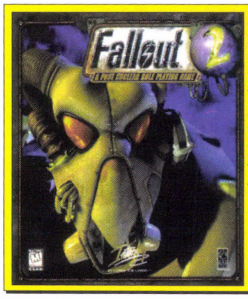

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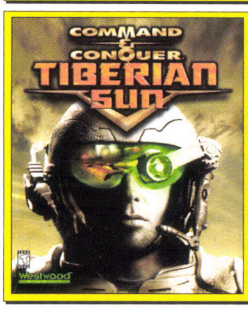

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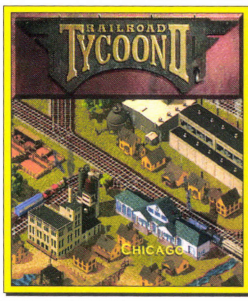

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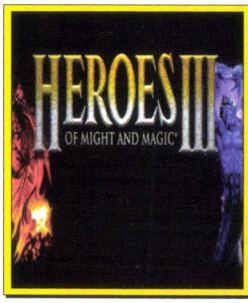

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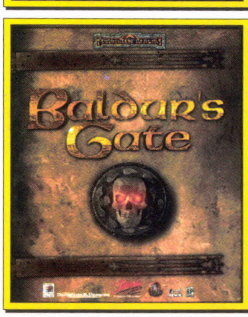

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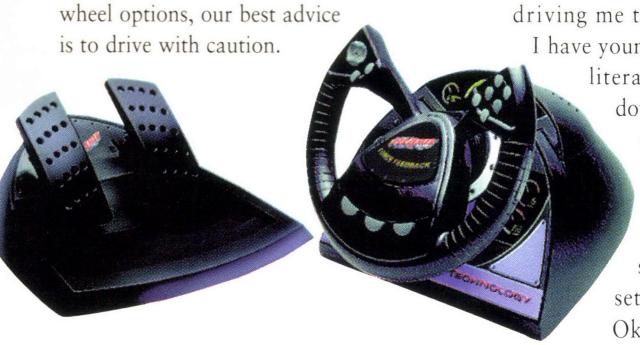
Crash and Burn

Two wheels ready for a demolition derby

With the number of good racing games on the horizon like Need for Speed III, Viper Racing, and Grand Prix Legends, you may be tempted to finally spring for a racing wheel to add that last bit of control and realism to your gameplay experience. But in a sea of new steering-wheel options, our best advice is to drive with caution.



Ultimate Per4mer Force Feedback Wheel

RATING: D-

There are many individuals who don't appreciate force feedback—I'm not one of them. So, when handed SC&T's Ultimate Per4mer Force Feedback Wheel (aka the UP-300) to review, I was ecstatic. Prior to the UP-300, I'd only had a crack at Microsoft's Side-Winder Force Feedback Wheel. And despite the fact that Microsoft's wheel was remarkably impressive, I was looking forward to an underdog finally coming in and running the powerful behemoth off the road. That day has yet to come.

Simply put: I'd sooner wish 10 copies of unpatched Battlecruiser 3000AD to befall my worst enemy than torture them with this appalling motor-driven feedback contraption.

Aside from the sturdy clamps that hold the wheel in place, this thing's design isn't exactly da Vinci. For starters, it isn't a wheel at all! It's a Pac-Man shape with the 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock area completely carved out. In fact, because of the poor button arrangement occupying the 2–3 o'clock and 9–10 o'clock positions, you're left with a strictly 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock hold—not the most comfortable hand placement.

Speaking of the buttons, they're constructed out of the same material as the outer shell—rigid plastic. Thus, when the force feedback is in full effect, the buttons rattle loudly, driving me to extreme distraction—and I have younger sisters. To remedy this, I literally had to tape the buttons down in order to use the damn controller without losing my mind. A simple solution would've been to either make the buttons out of a softer rubber or have them set firmly in place.

Okay, but what about the force feedback itself? Is it at least up to snuff? For the most part, it's okay. During Need for Speed III, the effects were satisfactory. However, the effects programmed into games bundled with the controller (Sega Rally and Daytona USA Deluxe) were as wretched as the wheel itself.

I could go on and on about this waste of $200, but I'll end with this: If you don't want to feed the Microsoft flame, that's fine. Go ahead and wait for ThrustMaster and Saitek to release their force-feedback wheels and see how they rate. (SC&T; 800-408-4084; www.per4mer.com; street $200) —*Joe McCloud*

Act Labs Racing Wheel

RATING: C-

Sure, I'll admit it. I played NASCAR 2 all weekend, tearing through 500 lap circuits like I was Tom Cruise in *Days of Thunder*; a can of Keystone Light in one hand and my favorite steering wheel in the other. So you can imagine how disgusted I was when this wheel's flimsy little shifter-levers broke off before I even plugged in the gameport cable.

Out of the box, this wheel looked like a winner. The first thing I noticed was its comfortable racing grip, followed by the solid pedal base that's so heavy it'd take an earthquake to tip it. It was all looking very good—that is, until I noticed the wheel's cheap D-pad and buttons, and flimsy shifter-levers (the thin plastic stalk broke easily the first time I tested them). Such obvious budget cuts are a blemish on the chin of a potentially wicked racing-wheel. This product may look like a winner, but looks can be deceiving.

The Racing Wheel features a multiplatform cartridge system that permits the wheel to be plugged into N64s and PlayStations—you just need to buy separate cartridges for each system. Setup on the PC was a breeze—just install the included drivers, and you're ready to go.

On to the road test. The wheel itself held up nicely during my test laps, with smooth turning and a comfortable rubber grip. But these don't help the fact that the wheel's buttons, levers, and D-pad all feel like cheap plastic. The pedals have an unconventional downward axis, as opposed to the standard horizontal axis, but they work just as well. Their very solid, very heavy base is the highlight of this product. This is one of the best sets of pedals in the industry and should be sold separately. As for the entire package, I think I'd pass. (Act Labs; 800-980-9997; www.actlab.com; street $70)

—*Nash Werner*

TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

Hey DOS game! We'll make your sound work in Windows!

By Matt Holmes

With the right configuring, you can hear all of Blood's delicious sounds in Windows 95/98.

Q How do I get my old DOS games to work with my sound card in Windows 95?

Joe Warner, via email

A *Because we get this question so often, we're going to take some extra space this month to answer it correctly. Here you have it—the* PC Games *guide to making DOS games roar in Windows 95/98.*

What to look for

DOS games check for specific hardware addresses they need in order to properly communicate with the sound card. There are four primary addresses that most DOS games need: the IRQ, I/O address, 8-bit DMA, and 16-bit DMA. In the old DOS days, these would be specified by the DOS installer program (provided by the manufacturer) in the form of drivers and a "SET BLASTER=" line, which looks like this:

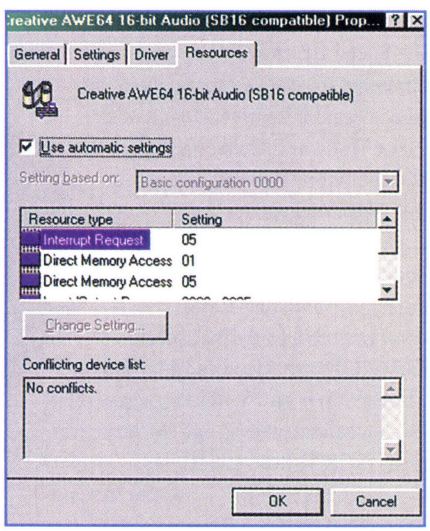
SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1 H5

In this example, A220 is the I/O Address, I5 is the IRQ, D1 is the 8-bit DMA, and H5 is the 16-bit DMA (Direct Memory Access). These settings are the "traditional" Sound Blaster settings.

Windows 95 configuration

For most DOS games you're having trouble with under Win 95, it's likely that you're just setting up the game with incorrect Sound Blaster parameters. You can find these parameters by opening up your Control Panel, clicking on System, then selecting Device Manager and "Sound, video, and game controllers." Look for the name of your sound card and check its audio resources.

Make sure there are no conflicts listed under "Conflicting device list." If there are no conflicts, write down the settings listed. With that information, all you'll need to do is run the setup program for whatever game you want to play and make sure the settings there match those Win 95/98 is living by. Sometimes Windows assigns resources that are not selectable in the game—for example, IRQ 10 is not selectable with some games. If Win 95 has assigned resources to settings that your



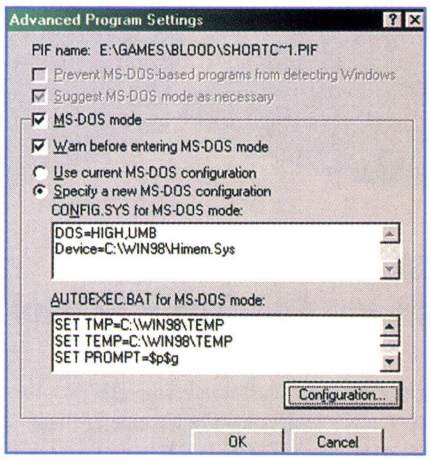
This window explains which resources Windows 95 is trying to use to communicate with your sound card.

game won't allow, you'll need to manually configure your settings. This can be a hazardous affair, as it can cause conflicts with other hardware in your computer: Win 95 will warn you if this occurs, and you may have to juggle settings. Once you uncheck "Use automatic settings," you will be allowed to select a "Basic configuration" and reassign your resources (IRQ, I/O addresses, DMA, etc.) by clicking on the Change Setting button. Tip: Configuration 6 is usually the aforementioned "traditional" setting.

MS-DOS mode configuration

If you plan on playing in DOS mode, Win 95 will create Sound Blaster configurations for you.

Open Windows Explorer in your Programs group under the Start menu. Find the executable program you want to run in DOS—for example, Blood.exe. Right-click on this program and select Create



This shortcut helps Windows 95 set up your game for DOS mode.

Shortcut. This will create a file named Shortcut to Blood.exe. Right-click on this file and select Properties. Under the Program tag, select Advanced. This window is where most of your DOS woes can be cured. If you check "MS-DOS mode," Win 95 will create a custom Config.sys and Autoexec.bat file for the game you've made the shortcut for. The Autoexec.bat will contain the "SET BLASTER=" line. When you run this shortcut, Win 95 will close down and restart in MS-DOS mode with the specified Sound Blaster settings. You should then run Blood's setup program in DOS and check the settings. If you forgot what the settings were, just type SET at the command prompt and DOS will tell you.

There you have it—the easy way to DOS-sound bliss.

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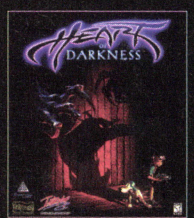

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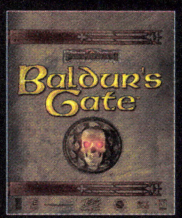
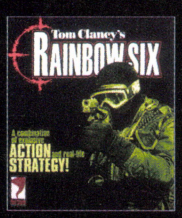


BALDUR'S GATE



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FACE-OFF

Doppler
Ash

Blasphemy in Games?

As developers burn the midnight oil to come up with games they hope will earn your dollars, are they overstepping respectful bounds by using religious connotations? Look at the themes of Afterlife, Messiah, Of Light and Darkness, and Heretic, and the titles SiN, Forsaken, and Amen. Doppler professes his **bold** beliefs that game companies are being offensive, while Ash presents his *italicized* retorts that to be affronted is going too far.

Game designers have sunk to a new low. I guess blood and gore don't sell games like they used to. It seems the new chic way of delivering shock value is to play off of Biblical or religious ideas. What does Forsaken have to do with Acclaim's game? Why SiN for Ritual's new shooter? This is wrong. These are themes that have a lot of meaning to a great many people who justifiably take offense when developers cheapen serious topics.

Jeezum Crow, listen to yourself! These companies are making games to be played for fun, and the Fahrenheit 451 *crowd wants to stamp its mark of "offensive" (read: "different") on anything that's personally upsetting. The moral majority needs to lighten up and take these games for what they are: a means of entertainment. Just because a game has the word "forsaken" or "sin" in the title doesn't mean that anyone who plays it will be forced to go out sinning and forsaking their way through the day.*

I'm not saying that these games will make you go out and get into Satanism, but how hard can it be to change some names around so it doesn't have a religious connection? Ritual's SiN has a guy fighting against the SinTech corporation, hence the name. Why not KonTech or whatever? They used the name for shock value—a quick throwaway. Making this connection is offensive to me. Where do we draw the line? Fun at what cost? Religion is a personal thing; people take it seriously. What if I made a game called Kill Ash's Mom? You would take that as a personal offense. What if we had a game called Presidential Assassination? The Republicans might like it, but a whole lot of Democrats would be pissed.

Well, I don't know if Kill Ash's Mom would be on my family gift list, but I'd still probably try the game out before filing the lawsuit. My point is that it would still be just a game. By playing it, I wouldn't be harming my mom in any way, shape, or form (unless we hooked up for a multiplayer Kill Ash's Mom deathmatch—then she'd be toast!). And if for some reason a wacko who had just finished up the 48th level of Presidential Assassination decided to go out and ice the real pres, it would be because they were a disgruntled intern or something, not because the game told them to do it.

You know you're lying through your teeth if you're not offended just a little. My point about Presidential Assassination is not that it would encourage people to do it, just that some people would take offense. And here we are, dealing with an authority even higher than the President, and nobody objects. I find nothing funny about insulting God in games, like in Messiah where a chubby angel possesses and kills people to stop Armageddon, or the way you shape Heaven and Hell in Afterlife. That's not how it happens in the Bible, and I don't think such titles should be on the market.

Well, obviously some people do object. While you've gotten your panties in a bunch about it, I think it's a good sign that there's not some incredible uproar—and hey, I'm from the Midwest. It shows that most people still have a sense of humor and the ability to distinguish between games and reality. Even if I was offended by a game where the goal was to kill my mom, I wouldn't want it banned from the market. That's censorship, it violates the First Amendment of our God-fearing country's Constitution—and I wouldn't want to disappoint those gamers out there who really have it in for my mom.

You can find Doppler on Battle.net distributing manifestos to the damned cheaters, while Ash is still trying to get past that final boss (Dad) in Kill Ash's Mom.

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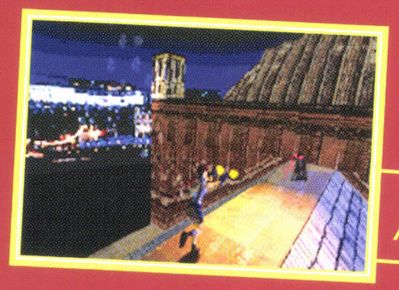

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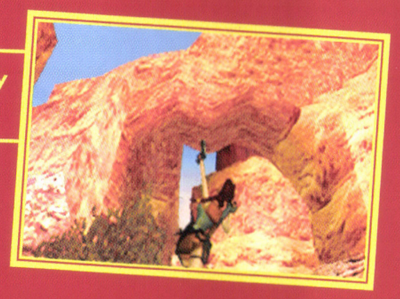
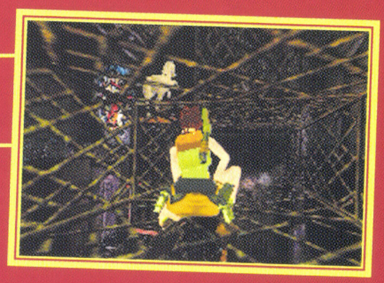


Annihilate your way through 15 levels of high-res mercilessness.

Monkey swing, crawl or sprint-dash when you can't fight your way out.

Wreak havoc through snow, wind and rain with jaw-dropping realism.

Check your gut in manic, eyeball-blistering action.



Kayak rapids and motorcycle your escape from environments that will lose your mind.

PC CD

TOMB RAIDER III ADVENTURES OF LARA CROFT

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TOMB RAIDER
ADVENTURES OF LARA CROFT
III

Microsoft®

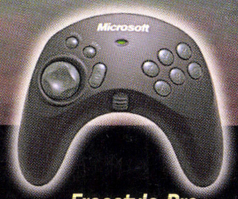
Move

...THE CONTROLLER HARD RIGHT AND YOUR BIKE MOVES HARD RIGHT TO AVOID A PILE-UP

...THE CONTROLLER HARD LEFT AND USE MUSCLES YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD AS YOU DIVE INTO A LOOP-TO-LOOP

...THE CONTROLLER HARDLY AT ALL AND COMMAND THE GAME WITH EVER SO SUBTLE MOVEMENTS THAT'LL LEAVE YOUR OPPONENT IN TEARS

Welcome to the Microsoft® SideWinder® Freestyle Pro joystick. Now you can throw yourself into the action. Literally. Every on-screen movement is controlled with your own movement. It's called motion-sensing technology. Accurate and highly responsive, not to mention works with your favorite games. It's programmable buttons and super slick design fits your hand like a glove. Which is handy when you're throwing yourself from one side of the room to the other.



Freestyle Pro

MICROSOFT® SIDEWINDER

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